

READING DRAMA

DOLL'S HOUSE

HENRIC IBSEN (1828-1906)

Henric Ibsen was a well-known Norwegian playwright. The works of Ibsen along with those of Emile Zola (1840-1902) introduced the spirit of realism and naturalism in drama. Ibsen placed the themes and situations of contemporary life on stage and made serious drama a mirror as well as a stern monitor of his age. His first play, 'Catillina' (1850), is a tragedy in verse. 'Love's Comedy', a satire was published in 1862. It was followed an national drama entitled 'The Pretenders' (18643). In 1869, he published 'League of Youth" and in 1873, 'Emperor Galelian', a philosophical historical drama on the Roman Emperor Julian, the Apostle. 'Pillars of the Society: (1877) is a realistic social drama, exposing the hypocrisy and degradation of community leaders. "A Doll's House (1879), portrayed a woman's assertion of her independence and individuality by breaking off her family bonds. 'Ghosts'(1881) 'An Enemy of the People' and 'The Wild Duck" are some of the major plays of Ibsen.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY “A DOLL’S HOUSE”

“A Doll’s House” (1879) is one of the greatest realistic social plays written by Henric Ibsen. The theme of the play is the status of women in society in general and in marriage in particular. It is a total plea for women’s rights not merely to vote but for her right to exist as a responsible member of society. Ibsen was conscious of society’s prejudiced expectation of woman. This had troubled him. In “A Doll’s House”, Ibsen elevates the heroine, Nora Helmer from the status of a doll to an individual in her own rights who is capable of taking of her own decisions. The dominant theme of the play is thus the emancipation of the self. Ibsen also draws attention to secondary issues like the injustice of stringent social laws, inherited illness etc. Ibsen boldly asserts that it is not the prerogative of man alone to militate against those social institutions, obsolete ideas of duty, loyalty and moral obligation that keep him from a realization of self. Women too have equal right to the freedom of the self. The play charts Nora’s progressive growth in self- realization from her early doll-like existence; from being a caged song bird and dependent squirrel totally reliant upon her husband Torvald Helmer for emotional and economic security to a young woman from whose eyes the scales have fallen. Nora, in the end, becomes aware of the stifling nature of her dependency and of the little premium that is allowed to her love and self-sacrifice and ultimately gains the courage to turn her back upon a catastrophic existence.

In “A Doll’s House”. Nora Helmer is the daughter of a government official. It was while officially examining her father’s accounts that Helmer first met her. He falls in love

with her and marries her. By the time the play opens they had been married for nine years. Soon after their marriage, Helmer had been seriously ill and Nora's father too is on his death bed. Not desiring to trouble her father for a loan, Nora secretly borrows the money from Krogstad without Helmer's Knowledge and permission. Nora signs her father's name on the promissory note. Helmer's life is saved and Nora manages to pay off a part of her secret debt. She is not seriously bothered by her concealment as in her mind; it is justified because of her love for her husband.

After some years of frugal living, Helmer gets a well-paid job as the manager of a bank. Nils Krogstad from whom Nora has borrowed the money is a clerk in the same bank where Helmer has been promoted to the position of a manager. Krogstad's character is shady and one of Helmer's first decision as bank manager is to dismiss Krogstad. It is at this point that the drama begins. Krogstad approaches Nora and makes known that he is aware that she had forged her deceased father's signature. He makes her aware of the serious and criminal nature of her action. Nora says that she has not done anything to hurt anyone and that her motive was based only on love for her husband who was seriously ill and her father who lay dying; when Krogstad threatens to reveal her secret to Helmer, she is forced to intercede for him with her husband with the request that he be reinstated. When her intercession has been ineffectual Krogstad threatens to reveal the whole situation in a letter to Helmer.

When the curtain rises, Nora is seen telling silly lies in a childlike manner. Helmer treats her like an irresponsible being. She is nothing more than a plaything to him. Her father and husband have conspired to keep her ignorant of the true

realities of life, of her rights, of her obligations. She has always felt a vague longing for a life more satisfying. It is this desire that has afforded her a secret satisfaction in her struggle to hold on to her priceless secret regarding the money to which Helmer owes his life. But Nora is totally misunderstood by her husband.

The play depicts Helmer as a kind of moral sensualist, thoroughly self-righteous, shallow and egoistic. When the play opens he is Nora's hero, who would protect and shield her from all harm. But all the goodness with which she invests her husband is in fact a reflection of all the goodness that lies within her. Nora believes that in the event of Krogstad exposing her, Helmer will take the blame upon himself in order to protect her. Overcome by her love for her husband, she even contemplates committing suicide.

Krogstad drops the letter revealing all into Helmer's letter box. Inspired by the influence of Christine Linde, Nora's old classmate whom Krogstad had once loved, he could be persuaded to demand his letter back unopened. Nora somehow wants to distract Helmer's attention from the mail-box in order to gain time. On the pretext that she is not through with the Tarantella, the dance that she is to perform at the costume ball the next day, she begs Helmer to devote his complete attention to her. Her over wrought condition prompts Helmer to postpone opening the letter box till the next day. Nora insists that Helmer go and read his letters, intending in the meanwhile to escape from the house and drown herself. However Helmer rushes in from his study with Krogstad's letter in his hand.

Helmer now reveals himself to be an extremely selfish and unloving person. He overwhelms Nora with painful and brutal reproaches and in that moment Nora sees him for what he

actually is. Her idol crumbles down before her. In the midst of Helmer's chastisement of Nora, another letter arrives from Krogstad enclosing the forged note and relinquishing all vindictive designs. Overcome by relief, Helmer 'forgives' Nora and once again. But Nora is now a disillusioned woman. She has now discovered the reality of the character of her husband.

Nora is now a changed woman. She is no longer prepared to continue to be a doll- wife. Her father had always treated her as a baby-doll and that her husband has always treated her as a doll-wife. She tells Helmer, that she has decided to leave her doll-house. She is now an individual in her own rights. She is no longer prepared to submit blindly to the conventions of society or the dictates of morality or religion. She walks out of the house slamming the door behind her, leaving her husband and children alone to find out by first-hand experience what is right and what is wrong.

“A DOLL’S HOUSE” : A SYNOPSIS

THE STORY OF A WOMAN’S LIBERATION FROM CONVENTIONAL RESTRAINTS:

“A Doll’s House” written by the Norwegian dramatist, Henric Ibsen, is a play in three Acts. It was written at a time when women were completely subordinated to their husbands. No matter how much a husband might love his wife, she was regarded by him in those days as his property. Custom and convention demand that she should be guided completely by her husband and should in all respects, adjust herself to his ideas, views, opinions and tastes. This meant that a woman had no opportunity to develop her own mind and her own

individuality.

“A Doll’s House” tells the story of a woman called Nora who, after having lived as a conventional kind of wife to her husband for nine years or so ultimately decided to liberate herself from the clutches of a male dominated society. In order to liberate herself this woman left her husband and even her three children. She went into the world outside to get a firsthand experience of life and to discover her own right to live as a responsible member of society.

A LOAN AND AN ACT OF FORGERY:

Torvald Helmer, his wife Nora and their three children are living in a comfortable apartment in a big town where Helmer has been a lawyer of modest means so that Nora has always found it necessary to exercise the utmost economy in household expenses. The play begins on a Christmas eve and ends about three days later. Eight years ago Helmer had fallen critically ill and the doctors had advised Nora to take him to a warm climate in southern Europe. Nora did not have enough money for such a trip and yet it was necessary for her to take her husband to a warm country, if his life was to be saved. Without telling

her husband anything about the step, she was going to take a loan in order to obtain the money required for the purpose. She entered into a transaction with a man called Krogstad. She borrowed twelve hundred dollars on interest from him and executed a bond. It had been necessary for her to have the bond signed by someone who would stand surety for the repayment of the loan.

As there was no other surety available, she was forced to forge

her own father's signature on the bond without realizing that forgery was a criminal act. It so happened that Krogstad detected the forgery. But he kept silent about it because Nora had been paying regular monthly instalments to him against the loan. She had taken her husband to Italy. After a year's stay, he had completely recovered his health. Nora had never told him about the loan or forgery. It would have hurt his self-respect to know that his wife had borrowed the money for his sake. He would never have tolerated her act of forgery if he had come to know of it.

Mrs. LYND'S VISIT TO NORA:

Mrs. Lynde, a friend of Nora's school days comes to see Nora. Lynd is now a widow. She needs a job. She thinks that Nora might be able to help her. Nora introduces Lynd to her husband who promises to give Mrs. Lynd a job in the bank of which he has recently been appointed the manager.

HELMER'S REASONS FOR DISMISSING KROGSTAD:

Krogstad is already working in a subordinate position in the same bank. Helmer and Krogstad had been great friends during their boyhood but now Helmer holds Krogstad in contempt. Krogstad spoilt his reputation by an act of forgery. However he had escaped punishment by placing the crime on someone else's shoulder. Helmer had come to know of Krogstad's act of forgery and had therefore formed a low opinion about him. Therefore Helmer had decided to dismiss Krogstad from his post in the bank, and now when Nora recommends Lynd for a Job, Helmer makes up his mind to appoint Lynd to the post which would be vacated by the dismissal of Krogstad. Helmer has also another reason for his contempt of Krogstad. Krogstad

always speaks to Helmer in a familiar manner, addressing him by his Christian name and behaving as if the friendship still exists. Helmer does not want that a man in a subordinate position should behave as if he were his friend. Helmer is totally unaware of the fact that his wife had borrowed money from this man and that she too is guilty of forgery.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN Mrs. LYND AND KROGSTAD:

Krogstad and Mrs. Lynd had been lovers when they were both unmarried. Christine Lynd had promised to marry Krogstad, but for certain compelling family circumstances she had married a man of wealth. When she deserted Krogstad, he felt that the earth under his feet had crumbled. However, in due course, he too had married and had begotten children, but he had subsequently lost his wife and is now a widower. Mrs. Lynd had also lost her husband and she is a widow now. But she has no children. When Mrs. Lynd comes to Nora in order to get her help in getting a job, Krogstad comes to see Helmer in order to request him not to dismiss him. Mrs. Lynd and Krogstad see each other. But they give no sign of mutual recognition.

HELMER'S REJECTION OF NORA'S RECOMMENDATION ON KROGSTAD'S BEHALF:

Krogstad does not get any assurance from Helmer in the matter of retaining him in the bank. Therefore Krogstad deliberates a plan for revenge. He would use the bond in which Nora forged her father's signature as a weapon against the Helmers. He meets Nora secretly and asks her to exercise her influence

upon Helmer so that he could continue in his post in the bank. He threatens that if she fails to do so, he would make public her act of forgery. Nora is scared. She speaks to Helmer on behalf of Krogstad. But he rejects Nora's recommendation. In fact, he sends an order of dismissal to Krogstad.

KROGSTAD'S INCRIMINATING LETTER:

The order of dismissal makes Krogstad indignant. He meets Nora once again. He now wants that he should be promoted to a higher position in the bank. He wants to wash away the stigma that is attached to his name by his act of forgery. He has brought with him a letter describing Nora's entire transaction with him and her act of forgery and he says that if her husband does not accept his demand, he will publicly disgrace both of them. As Nora is in no position to help Krogstad, he drops the incriminating letter into Helmer's letter box.

Mrs. LYND TO MARRY KROGSTAD:

Nora reveals all the facts to Mrs. Lynd. Mrs. Lynd thinks that she can still influence Krogstad on the basis of the love that had existed between them. Lynd makes a visit to Krogstad and tells him of the circumstance in which she had to marry another man. Now she promises him that she would be mother to his motherless children. Lynd's offer of marriage fills Krogstad with greatest pleasure. He readily accepts the offer and also offers to withdraw the incriminating letter which he had dropped into Helmer's letter box. But Mrs. Lynd now feels that Helmer should be allowed to know all the facts of the case so that the husband and wife can come to a stable understanding. Mrs. Lynd meets Nora and tells her that it would be best for her if Helmer comes to know all the facts from Krogstad's letter. In the meanwhile Nora has tried to

obtain some money from a family friend by the name of Dr. Rank who has been secretly in love with her. Her purpose in obtaining money from him was to pay the balance of the loan which she owes to Krogstad and to get rid of the man altogether. But she has failed to obtain the money.

Helmer goes through Krogstad's letter and becomes furious to learn that Nora had borrowed money from that man and had forged her father's signature to get the money. He begins to scold her calling her a hypocrite, a liar and a criminal. He says that the public disclosure of her act of forgery would disgrace him and might even lead to his losing of the job. Nora had thought that, on coming to know the facts, Helmer would take the entire responsibility for her guilt and would face Krogstad's threat boldly. In fact she had even thought of committing suicide in order to prevent Helmer from taking the responsibility for her guilt, because she did not want that he should have to make such a great sacrifice for her sake. But she is shocked to find that her husband is not trying to protect her, and that he is accusing her of immorality.

NORA COMPLETELY DISILLUSIONED WITH HER HUSBAND:

Just at this time, a second letter comes from Krogstad. This letter contains an apology and for having threatened Nora and Helmer. This second letter implies that there is no longer any danger of a public disclosure of Nora's criminal act. The crisis for the Helmers is now over. Helmer now becomes jubilant and promptly assumes once again the role of a loving and dotting husband. He now tells Nora that he forgives her and that she has nothing to fear now. He will love her, protect her, and guide her through out life, just as he has been doing in the past.

But Nora is now a disillusioned woman. She has now discovered the reality of the character of her husband to whom she has been so devoted and whose word had always been law for her.

NORA'S EXIT FROM HER HUSBAND'S HOME:

Another crisis develops. Nora is now a changed woman. A light has dawned upon her mind. She tells her husband that she is no longer prepared to continue to be his doll-wife. Her father had always treated her as a baby-doll and that her husband has always treated her as a doll-wife. She tells Helmer that she has decided to leave this doll's house. She has now realized that she is an individual in her own rights. She is no longer prepared to submit blindly to the conventions of society or to the dictates of morality and religion. She is determined to go into the world to find out by first-hand knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. Her most sacred duty, she says, is not to her husband or to her children, but to herself. She thinks it imperative that she should discover the truths of life. She demands from Helmer the wedding ring which she had given him at the time of their marriage and she gets it back. She returns his wedding ring to him and tells him that she is now leaving him, her home, and even her children to begin a new life. After saying all these and paying no attention to Helmer's entreaties, she walks out of the house, slamming the door behind her.

RIDERS TO THE SEA

EDMUND JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

Edmund John Millington Synge (pronounced Sing) was born in 1871 in a Dublin Suburb of Anglo-Irish Protestant Landowners. An uncle of Synge had gone to the Aran Islands as a Protestant Missionary. His family was much associated with the church. Young Synge was brought up in the strict form of Protestantism. Yet his boyhood was spent among the hills and mountains of South Dublin. His passions for the countryside helped him to acquire “a knowledge of natural history more intimate than Wordsworth’s” and his love of nature continuously reflected in the imagery and descriptive passages of his plays.

Synge’s meeting with W. B Yeats was a turning point in his dramatic career. Yeats advised him thus:

“.....Go to the Aran Islands, live there as if you were one of the people themselves, express a life that has never found expression”.

This advice came at a time when Synge himself was meditating upon going to Aran Islands. Synge went to the Aran Islands in 1898. It was the time of Irish Literary Renaissance. He wrote a series of articles on the kind of life he saw on the island. The time was congenial to dramatize the new life and stage it at the Abbey theatre. The Irish National Theatre Society formed in 1902 assisted Synge to stage his first play

“In the Shadow of the Glen (1903) at the Abbey, followed by “Riders to the Sea” (1904).

BACKGROUND TO “RIDERS TO THE SEA”

The Aran Islands consist of three small islands: Irishmoore, Irishmaan and Irisheer in the Atlantic between the coasts of Galway and Clare. The land is stony and not very good for cultivation.

Synge’s life among the people of Aran Islands, his temperament and his negative capability along with his knowledge of Gaelic language gives an easy access to befriend them. He could feel the contrast between his life in Paris and this one; he feels quite comfortable in their company. The main source of livelihood was fishing. The sea has both been the preserver and the destroyer of life. The people never learned swimming as it would prolong their suffering before death. There are superstitious stories among the Islanders. If one’s hat is blown off by the wind he must not try to get it back; one has to go for another hat. Likewise, they should not try to snatch anything from the sea. A star seen rising close to the Moon is conceived to be ominous. Thus these islanders are steeped in their supernatural beliefs and omens, in spite of having Christians.

“Riders to the Sea” is full of references to omens, to death, to burial, to the scene in the churchyard, to the coffin boards, to the keen and to the ghastly story told by Bride Dara. All these beliefs and references build the tragic atmosphere of the play.

“Riders to the Sea” is a tragedy in one Act. It presents the essential conflicts that are known and bound to happen and accepted as a part of life on the Islands. The conflict is between

the raging sea and the humble humanity. The protagonist Maurya undergoes untold mental agony from the beginning in spite of the prayers and consolations offered by Christianity. The prayers become powerless in the cruel face of reality.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY:

Mauria, an old woman Bartley, her son Cathleen, her daughter Nora, a younger daughter Men and women

The scene of action is laid in a cottage on an island off the West of Ireland.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY:

Synge's 'Riders to the Sea' is a stark modern tragedy in one act. It is equivalent of Greek tragedy. The scene of action is laid in a cottage on an Aran Island off the West of Ireland.

The play is based on the incidents Synge observed during his visit to the Aran Island. While talking to the people of the Island, he felt as though they were fated people foredoomed to suffering. The play presents the unequal fight between man and the sea. The sea has been a source of livelihood to the family of Mauria but it has also devoured all the sturdy men folk of the family. The Riders to the Sea under reference in the title are Maura's father-in-law, her husband, and her six sons. But in the play there are only two riders- Mauria's last surviving son Bartley and his spectral brother Michael. Her father-in-law, her husband and her five sons have already been swallowed by the sea before the play begins.

When the play begins we see some white boards in Mauria's Kitchens. These have been brought to make coffin for Michael who had been drowned some nine days before the play begins.

The grief stricken mother would frequently go the sea-beach to look if Michael's body is being washed ashore.

Cathleen, Mauria's Elder daughter is preparing a cake for Bartley. Her younger sister Nora enters with a bundle of clothes kept hidden under the shawl. The clothes belong to a man drowned in the sea. The village priest had given Nora these clothes for identification. Cathleen proposed to hide them in the turf-lot lest the mother should find it. Bartley had decided to go big horse fair in Connemare. Mauria forbids him. She has a vague fear that the voyage would be fatal to him. Mauria had also seen a star rising close

by the Moon; she takes it to be ominous. Still Bartley leaves riding on a red mare and being followed by a grey pony which is made to run after him without a rider.

Mauria cries out that Bartley would soon die. She says "I will have no son left me in the world." Cathleen admonishes her to go and bless Bartley and give him a cake. Mauria goes out. The two sisters now opens the bundle to compare the flannel shirt with Michael's other shirt. But Bartley had put it on. However the stockings are the one knit by Nora. Michael's fate is doomed. The girls begin to bemoan.

Mauria returns weeping softly. The cake meant for Bartley is still in her hand. She has seen a fearful sight: Bartley riding on red mare being followed by a grey pony with the ghost of Michael upon it. Mauria is so astonished by the sight that she could not give Bartley either Blessing or cake. It is the "fearfullest thing seen since Bride Dara saw the dead man with a child in his arm"

Mauria reminiscences how she had lost her husband, father-in-

law, then her four sturdy sons in the sea. When the fourth son Patch was dead, she saw women coming to kee with her and men carrying his dead body and laying it before her. At this moment an old woman comes in, weeping and lamenting. Mauria could not be sure whether her neighbours were lamenting for Patch or Michael. Cathleen informs her that Michael's dead body had been found in the far north and decently buried. Now several men come in carrying the dead body of Bartley on a plank. Bartley died by being knocked over into the sea by the grey pony.

Bartley's dead body is placed by the neighbours on the table in the room. The women began to kee softly. The men knelt near the door. Cathleen and Nora knelt at one end of the table. Mauria knelt down at the head of the table. With calm resignation, she says she has no male folk left in her house. She would care no more for tide and storm.

“They are all gone, and there is n't

Anything more the sea can do to me.”

All her prayers for Bartley had proved futile. She would now have long rest and quiet sleep in the winter night. She sprinkled holy water on Bartley's dead body and Michael's clothes and invoked the blessing of God on the soul of her dead sons and the soul of every one left living in the world. She found consolation in the thought that she had done to the dead all that was humanely possible to do and that no man could be living forever.

MODULE III: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

MACBETH WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare is perhaps the greatest name in the whole realm of English literature, yet there is no authoritative biography available; only the barest outlines of the man are known for certain. It is generally believed that William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born on 23 April, 1564 at Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England, as the son of John and Mary Arden Shakespeare. The poet's father was a butcher and wool merchant in turn, who rose to be an alderman of the town (municipal councilor). At the age of seven, William was sent to the Town Grammar school where the chief study was Latin. He was not a studious boy in the narrow sense of the word. William seems to have learnt more from his companionship with other boys and from outdoor activities, than from the formal education at school; moreover the natural surroundings of the places in and around Stratford sank deep into his sensitive and extraordinary mind.

When William was only twelve years of age his father's fortunes began to decline, as a result of which the boy had to leave school and help his father in business. It is not known for certain what all jobs William took up in order to help his family which was indeed passing through a crisis. Before he was twenty, he married Anne Hathaway, daughter of a farmer, who was eight years his senior. The couple had three children—a daughter Susanna and a set of twins, Hamlet, and Judith. At

twenty two, William Shakespeare left Stratford for London in search of work. The immediate cause of his departure seems to have been police action following his poaching (hunting without permission) deer on the estate of Sir Thomas Lucy.

Shakespeare had a tough time initially in London. For some time he worked in theatres looking after the horses of gentlemen who came to watch plays. This gave him an opportunity to become familiar with acting and even writing plays. Gradually Shakespeare improved his skills and at the age of twenty seven he began writing and producing his first play. Soon he acquired wealth, married off his two daughters and at fifty two; he passed away, having lived a contented and happy life at his home in Stratford.

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS AND POEMS:

Shakespeare's dramatic career extends over a period of nearly twenty-two years from 1590 to 1612. His literary output includes two long poems, namely, 'The Rape of Laurence', and 'Venus and Adonis', 153 sonnets and 37 plays. Some of his famous plays are as follows:

- . (a) Comedies Two Gentlemen of Verona As You Like It A Midsummer Night's Dream
- . (b) Tragic-Comedies Merchant of Venice Much Ado about Nothing Measure for Measure
- . (c) Tragedies Hamlet Othello King Lear Macbeth
- . (d) History plays Richard II Henry IV
- . (e) Roman plays Julius Caesar Antony and Cleopatra
- . (f) Last plays (Romances) Cymbeline The Winter's Tale The

Tempest As a poet and dramatist, Shakespeare enjoys a unique position in the history of

English literature. He has written plays on a wide variety of themes- domestic, personal, romantic, political and psychological. He did not invent his plots; instead he borrowed freely from every available source, but transmuted or changed them into something new and superior. Shakespeare was an expert in describing several kinds of characters including kings, nobles, queens generals, villains and clowns.

Shakespeare is fortunate to have lived during the Elizabethan period (16th century), since queen Elizabeth was a great patron of art and literature and encouraged Shakespeare and his likes most generously. Many of his plays were written and staged to felicitate some royal function such as a wedding or a triumph.

Detailed, Scene-wise Summary of the play with

The tragedy ends on a note of peace. Macbeth is killed and peace is restored. The period of convulsion is over and the moral orders are once again in full control. Evil has been expelled and poetic Justice has been rendered to the evil-doer.

GENERAL ESSAYS

1. Shakespearean Tragedy: Chief Characteristics. The four Great Tragedies.

Shakespeare has left behind him a number of great tragedies. But 'Hamlet', 'Othello', 'Macbeth' and 'King Lear' are his greatest creations. They rank among the greatest tragedies of the world

Conflict of Good and Evil

The theme of a Shakespearean tragedy is the conflict between Good and Evil. It is concerned with the ruin of the life of man. Its subject is the struggle between the struggle of Good and Evil in the world. It portrays men and women struggling with Evil; they often yield to Evil and are brought to death by :

Melodramatic effect.

Shakespeare wrote for the stage and not for our arm-chair reading. In his tragedies he introduces a series of excitements. The themes of all the four great tragedies are sensational. 'Macbeth' presents witches, ghosts, apparitions, and the murder of King Duncan in a darkened castle, the scene of the drunken porter and that of Lady Macbeth's sleep walking. In 'Hamlet', we have the ghost and the grave diggers, and in 'Othello' night alarms and sword fights.

A Tale of Suffering.

Shakespearean tragedy is pre-eminently the story of one person, "the hero" or at the most of two, the hero and the heroine. It is only in the love tragedies like 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Antony and Cleopatra' that the heroine is as much the center of action as that of the hero. A typical Shakespearean tragedy is a single star. The story leads up to the death

of the hero. At the end, the stage is often strewn with dead bodies. A Shakespearean tragedy is essentially a tale of suffering.

Tragic Hero

The tragic heroes all stand in a high degree. They are either kings or princes, or great military generals. Thus Hamlet is the prince, Lear is a king, and Macbeth is a general. These great

personages suffer greatly. Their suffering is exceptional. Thus Macbeth, after the murder of King Duncan, suffers the tortures of Hell, as if there were scorpions in his brain. Othello is on the rack with jealousy. Lear goes mad and Hamlet's soul is torn within. The hero is such an important personality that his fall affects the welfare of a whole nation. His fall produces a sense of helplessness of man in front of the powerful fate.

Tragic Flaw

The tragic heroes of Shakespeare are all driven to their downfall on account of their hamartia or tragic flaw. Thus Macbeth has 'over vaulting ambition', Hamlet suffers from inability to take action, and Othello has suspicious jealousy, and Lear, uncontrollable passion. Owing to the fault of his character, the tragic hero falls from greatness. The character of the hero is responsible for his actions. They appear to be the instruments shaping their own destiny. It is in this sense that the dictum "Character is Destiny" is true of Shakespearean tragedy.

Three Complicating Factors

The characteristic deeds of the hero are influenced and complicated by the following three additional factors.

Some abnormal conditions of the mind such as Lear's madness, Macbeth's hallucinations, Lady Macbeth's somnambulism etc.

The supernatural, ghosts and witches.

The supernatural element is not a mere illusion of the hero. The witches in Macbeth and the ghost in Hamlet have an objective existence as they are seen by other characters also.

Further, the supernatural does contribute to the action, and is often an indispensable part of it. It gives an insight into the inner working of the hero's mind. The witches Macbeth sees are symbolic of the guilt switching his soul.

Chance or accident.

In most of the Shakespearean tragedies such as 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Othello' and 'Hamlet' chance plays a prominent part. For example, it is just a chance that Desdemona dropped her handkerchief at the crucial moment and that Bianca arrived on the scene just at the time to serve the purpose of Ingo. It is just a chance that Edgar arrived too late at the prison to save Cordelia's life. Macbeth is the only tragedy of Shakespeare from which chance events are absent.

Conflict – Internal and External. The action of a Shakespearean tragedy always develops through conflict. The

conflict is both external and internal. External conflict is the conflict between two persons or two groups. Internal conflict is the struggle in the mind of the hero between two opposing courses of action. Thus there is conflict in Macbeth between ambition and loyalty to the king. Othello is torn within himself between love and jealousy, and Hamlet hesitates and broods and does nothing. In this way the soul of the hero is laid bare before us. The spectacle of suffering is terrible. It arouses the feelings of pity and fear. Shakespearean tragedy is truly "Cathartic" i.e. it purges the readers of the emotions of pity and fear.

No poetic Justice

Many critics point out that there is no poetic justice in a Shakespearean tragedy. The tragic heroes suffer more than is

deserved by their faults. The good and the virtuous are often crushed and they do not get the prosperity they deserve. Lear and Othello suffer terribly out of all proportion to their faults; and Desdemona and Cordelia are wholly good.

Still, the former is choked to death and the latter, hanged. Poetic justice is not a fact of life and so Shakespeare, the realist does not introduce it in his tragedies.

In short, Shakespeare's tragic vision is solemn, terrible and convincing in its reality.

2. 'Macbeth' as a typical Shakespearean tragedy

A Shakespearean tragedy is the story of a man in high status, whose deeds and sufferings have impact upon a nation or empire. A Shakespearean tragic hero is impelled irresistibly by his own character and circumstances to engage in a series of action. They bring about widespread ruin and desolation and the ultimate destruction of himself. Tragedy reflects the conflict and tension between good and evil in the external world and a Shakespearean tragedy is no exception. In addition to this external conflict, there is always an inner conflict in the character of the hero himself. The final impression left on our minds is not a feeling of gloom and depression but a heightened sense of the value and beauty of life.

“Macbeth’ conforms to this pattern fully. Macbeth appears always as an exalted personage. He is at first the thane of Glamis and then the thane of Cawdor and afterwards King of Scotland. His deeds and sufferings are of a great significance to the whole nation. He strikes us as the leader in a war as ‘Bellona’s bridegroom lapped in proof’. He is a man of mature experience. He is capable of deep philosophical reflection

Macbeth is the agent of his own tragedy. His own action brings about his destruction. There is no external compulsion on him. The supernatural element exercises only suggestion and no compulsion on his will.

The conflict between the forces of good and evil is more clearly marked in Macbeth than in any other tragedy. Macbeth himself is fascinating in his villainy. The death of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth alone cannot be adequate atonement for all the sufferings and calamities they have inflicted on the families of Duncan, Banquo, Macduff and countless other people. The deaths of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth do not move our pity, nor do we feel happy in their passing away.

Macbeth presents us with a character who is at once the hero and villain of his own tragedy. He betrays himself before he betrays King Duncan. He is the symbol of all frail humanity. The end of the play does not leave us depressed because Malcolm has been restored to the throne and his reign promises to be peaceful and happy. Macbeth's epitaph on Duncan i.e. "After life's fretful fever, he sleeps well!" is more appropriate to the death of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

3. The supernatural element in 'Macbeth'

Shakespeare has introduced the supernatural in a number of his plays. In 'Macbeth', he has introduced the ghost of Banquo as well as the unnatural ominous events such as those that take place on the night after the murder of Duncan. But, 'Macbeth' is the only play in which Shakespeare introduced the witches.

The supernatural in Macbeth can be analyzed on two levels: (i) The part played by the witches and (ii) the appearance of the ghost.

The role of the witches:

There are three witches in the play. Hecate is the Goddess of the witches. They are accompanied by their attendant spirits, a toad and a cat. They appear and disappear like bubbles of water. They use to cast their spells in a cauldron. They are unnatural creatures, neither men nor women, and they symbolize the evil in Nature. They meet in storms and can raise tempests, they are unnatural themselves, women with beards. They work their spell with fragments torn from the organs of men and animals. Their appearance is withered with 'choppy fingers and skinny lips' and they reduce their victims to the same condition. Their most powerful symbol is that of the 'birth strangles babe/Ditch-delivered by a drab.

In 'Macbeth' the witches combine the element both of superstition and scepticism. They have all reality and vividness of actual belief, but there are also suggestion that they are the products of the excited imagination, and so hallucinatory in nature. They are the vivid external presentation of the forces of evil.

The very first words uttered by the witches are "Fair is foul and foul is fair" These words strike the key-note of the play. They echo Macbeth's first words: 'so fair and foul a day I have not seen'

The witches' doctrine is in fact a self-deceiving one. 'Foul is not fair, but it only appears to be so. The witches equivocate with Macbeth in their initial promise to him of things that do sound so fair, as well as in the prophecies of the apparitions.

He achieves the title of King, but finds that he has sold his soul- his 'internal jewel 'for something that proves worthless.

They keep word of promise to his ear, but break it to his hope. Banquo does not believe in them and he seems not to care for their prophecy at the time, but their poison works on him also and there are suggestion that he too is lured by their prophecy that he would be the founder of a dynasty of kings.

In the case of Macbeth, the influence of these instruments of darkness is much more profound. On his very first appearance on the stage, Macbeth echoes them when he says “So foul and fair a day I have not seen”. They tempt and lead him away from goodness. Macbeth is peculiarly vulnerable to their influence because he hears them voice the desires of his heart and after his initial fear at being caught out, his mind moves easily along the route that indicate towards ‘the imperial theme’.

The theme of equivocation works out obviously through the witches and they are most striking voices of unnaturalness and disorder. The witches utter the riddles, which Macbeth in his weakness interprets in his own apparent interest. He is, therefore deceived not by the witches but by his ill-founded reliance on his own interpretations. However the witches cannot be dismissed as mere hallucinations as products of Macbeth’s beat oppressed brain, like the air drawn bloody dagger which he sees, for Banquo also sees and hears the witches.

The Ghost

Unlike the witches, the ghost of Banquo which appears in the Banquet scene is entirely hallucinatory in character. It is purely a subjective phenomenon. It is an objectification of the subjective state of Macbeth. It is a creation of his guilt-obsessed imagination and as Lady Macbeth reminds him very

much like the dagger he sees just before the murder of Duncan. That is why none else sees the Ghost. It does not speak and it vanishes as soon as Macbeth begins to address it. Macbeth himself regards it as an ‘unreal mockery’, a mere creation of his heated brain.

Macbeth sees the Ghost just after the murder of Banquo. It is a product of his guilt- obsessed imagination, an instrument of divine punishment and justice. Macbeth, a man celebrated for his courage in battle, cringes before the creation of his troubled conscience, and almost betrays himself to the assembled guests. Henceforth they are suspicious, and their suspicion goes on increasing as Macbeth marches ahead on his bloody career.

In short, the supernatural in the play has been closely integrated both with character and action. It is not merely horrible phenomenon. Shakespeare has introduced the supernatural in his plays because that was what the audience wanted as they believed in ghosts and witchcrafts.

4. The soliloquies of Macbeth

“Macbeth” is the only tragedy of Shakespeare in which the tragic hero turns a villain. However, Macbeth does not lose our sympathy. The soliloquies that Macbeth delivers at different stages of his career of murder, give us a glimpse into his inner soul.

Macbeth’s first soliloquy:

The first real soliloquy of Macbeth occurs in Act I, Scent vii. It reveals Macbeth’s ambivalent attitude to the murder of Duncan. He is desirous of becoming the king of Scotland and to fulfil his desire, he is willing to take the shortest and the

meanest way such as that of murder. But, he is afraid of the pricks of conscience and is bothered about the punishment in the other world. He cannot murder his own king who is good, virtuous and generous, a king who is a guest, a king who has done no harm to him but has rewarded him with honor and title. Macbeth gives expression to his ambivalent attitude through the first soliloquy. This soliloquy places Macbeth on a much higher plane than Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is more ambitious, more cruel and devilish than her husband. She has no sense of conscience at all.

Second Soliloquy.

This soliloquy of Macbeth occurs in Act II scene I as he proceeds to the bed- chamber of Duncan with his dark motive. The thought of the crime that he is about to commit oppresses his brain and he begins to have terrible hallucinations. He sees an air- drawn dagger with its hilt turned towards him, coming to him. He is to use such a kind of dagger to do away with Duncan. This soliloquy gives us a peep into the struggle in Macbeth's mind.

The third soliloquy:

This soliloquy occurs in Act III, scene i of the play Just before Macbeth prepares himself for the murder of Banquo. He is troubled by the prophecy of the witches that the sons of Banquo shall become the kings of Scotland. Therefore he feels insecure so long as Banquo and his son are alive. He decides to have them murdered. The soliloquy reveals Macbeth's fear and sense of insecurity.

Fourth soliloquy:

In his soliloquy at the end of Act IV, scene ii Macbeth

expresses his determination not to lose a single moment inputting his thought to action- that is, to order at once for the massacre of the family of Madoffs' family. This soliloquy reveals Macbeth's inclination to commit further crimes.

Last soliloquies

Macbeth's last two soliloquies reveal his frustration and disillusionment. These soliloquies begin "tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow" and "I have lived long enough". When Lady Macbeth's death is announced to him, Macbeth receives it calmly. He says that her death might have happened later. He points out how time makes fools of us by leading us from day to day with the hope of an infinite number of tomorrows to follow every today. All those who have lived and died had been subjected to the same foolish illusions in their time. In the concluding part of the soliloquy Macbeth conceives life as 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

The soliloquy of Lady Macbeth:

Lady Macbeth also utters one important soliloquy. She indulges in this soliloquy just after receiving the news that Duncan is to be her guest that night. She calls upon the murdering ministers, the powers of darkness, to unsex her, and the very violence of this invocation is a measure of womanly instincts that have to be suppressed. The violence done to nature in such suppression results in complete nervousness break-downs and we witness the terrible spectacle of her somnambulism.

5. The character of Macbeth

Macbeth is the tragic hero of the play. The first reference to

Macbeth is made by the witches. In Act I, scene, I the witches say that they would assemble on a desolate heath to meet Macbeth. At the end of the play Malcolm refers to him as ‘the dead butcher...’ The play has been rightly named after him, since he is the tragic hero.

Macbeth’s bravery and heroism:

Macbeth is a brave and heroic general. He is also the cousin of King Duncan. He successfully suppresses the rebellion of Macdonald, the Thane of Cawdor and his ally, the king of Norway. ‘Valour’s Minion’ and ‘Bellona’s Bridegroom’ are the epithets used to refer to Macbeth’s bravery and heroism.

His kindness:

Lady Macbeth refers to her husband as ‘too full of the milk of human kindnesses. He is also identified to be the cat in the proverb, which is desirous of catching the fish, but not willing to wet his paw.

The evil within him:

Macbeth is basically dishonest. On his first appearance on the stage, he echoes the words of the witches. He says “so fair and foul a day I have not seen” He has played most foully to gain the throne. In the second half of the play he is referred to as the tyrant. At the end ‘the cursed head of the dead butcher is displayed’

Macbeth’s over-vaulting ambition:

Macbeth is ambitious to become the king of Scotland. In fact ambition is the key- note of his character. He is ambitious to have kingship not only for his own self, but also for his progeny. It is this evil within him that transforms him into a

murderer.

His war on the future.

He might have been content to get the crown of Scotland But the witches also prophesied that Banquo would father a dynasty of kings, and so his own children would not be kings. He decides to have Banquo and Fleance murdered. Banquo is killed but Fleance escapes. The ambition to be the founder of a dynasty persuades him to meet the witches again. They prophecy that no man born of woman shall harm him. But ultimately he meets his doom at the hands of Macduff, ‘the man not born of woman.’”

Poetic imagination:

It is the poetic imagination that makes Macbeth have hallucinations. It makes him see the air drawn dagger and also the ghost of Banquo. It is his poetic imagination that makes him enumerate the values of sleep. His imagination makes him realize that he would sleep no more for ‘he has murdered sleep’. It is again his imagination that makes him visualize the consequences of the murder of Duncan and make him decide “we shall precede no further in this business”. Lady Macbeth chastises him and overcomes his opposition to murder. It is his imagination that makes him visualize his guilt in all its aspects.

Weakness of will:

Macbeth is weak of will and is easily carried away by the suggestion of others. He is never unaware of the enormity of his crime. He realizes the futility of the murder. Still he becomes a prey to the temptation of the witches and to the valour of the tongue of Lady Macbeth.

Bloody tyrant:

Macbeth is embarked on a career of crime. The evil in his is let loose and he becomes a tyrant. He murders Banquo but it brings him no peace. He also becomes suspicious of Macduff. Since Macduff is out of reach, he wreaks his vengeance on his wife and child.

His despair:

Macbeth ruined his peace in life with his murder of King Duncan. None of the good he philosophizes stoically. He says: life is tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

His tragic end:

Macbeth's end is truly tragic. We feel great pity for him who has suffered so much. At the beginning of the play, we heard how Macbeth cut off a traitor's head; and at the end, his won head is brought in as a symbol that evil has been destroyed.

6. The character of Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth has been referred to as "the fourth witch". "The fiend-like queen" is the epithet used by Malcolm to refer to her. It is she who chastises Macbeth by the valour of her tongue. She goads him overcome his hesitations and drives him to commit the murder of Duncan. She is ruthless in the pursuit of her goal. Duncan would never have been murdered, if Lady Macbeth had no iron will and determination. She calls upon the powers of evil to unsex her and to take away from her all womanly charity and kindness and to fill her from top to bottom with direst cruelty. But in the end it becomes clear that she is a woman with common feminine weakness.

Lady Macbeth is ambitious not for herself but for her husband. She considers him to be worthy of becoming the king of Scotland. The witches have prophesied the crown for Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is determined that he would have the crown. She says:

“Glamis thou art and Cawdor. And shalt be
What thou art promised”

Nothing deflects her from her purpose. She knows that her husband is infirm of purpose. To her there is no separation between the will and the deed. By sheer force of her will, she impels him to the deed. Her passionate courage makes him admire her in the following words:

“Bring forth men-children only
For thy undaunted mettle
should compose Nothing but males”

At her instigation, Macbeth murders the old king. But her essential feminine nature is noticeable from the very beginning. It is revealed in her famous words:

“Had he not resembled

My father as he slept, I had done it”
Again her womanly feeling is revealed when she says:

“I have given suck, and I know

How tender it is to love the babe that milks me”

Lady Macbeth is full of self-control and resourcefulness. She takes upon herself the direction of affairs and arranges everything for the easy execution of the deed. She maintains self-control in the Banquet scene. It is her presence of mind

that saves the situation. The appearance of the ghost of Banquo and Macbeth's reaction to it entirely ruins the feast. Neither Lady Macbeth nor the guests can understand his terror. With quick witted invention Lady Macbeth makes up an excuse. Macbeth has had this illness since his youth. It is nothing. They should take no notice of it. She tries her hardest to make him pull himself together, but no effect. Lady Macbeth's last resort is to ask the guests not to question him and then, with a complete lack of ceremony, she tells them all to go home. Doubts are aroused. But a full disclosure is prevented.

It is due to the lack of imagination that Lady Macbeth is not able to understand the consequence of the crime. The realization comes to her soon after the murder. At once she begins to sink. The glory of her dream soon fades away and exhausted and sleepless she exclaims:

“Naught is had, all is spent

Where our desire is got without content”

In the sleep walking scene she is broken, frustrated woman. She commits suicide. The strain of keeping up appearance has been too much for her. Shakespeare has made us pity her, evil though she is.