

Macbeth as a Shakespearean tragedy

Evaluate Macbeth's character as a Shakespearean Tragic Hero.

Or,

Discuss Macbeth as a typical Shakespearean tragedy.

Ans. In writing his tragedies, Shakespeare did not invent any theory of his own. He followed basically what the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle had laid down for the composition of a tragedy. All his famous tragedies such as Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth are written OR the same pattern.

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Several characteristics are commonly shared by these tragedies. Let us see them in detail. Shakespearean tragedy is the tale of a person of eminence and a high social position. A tragic hero is a man of high honor. Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark, Othello is the military general of Venice and Lear is the king of Britain. Likewise, Macbeth is the military general of Scotland. In this position, he is renowned for his heroic exploits and personal valor.

He is described as 'valor's minion and Hell's bridegroom'. Shakespearean tragedy is the story of the fall of such a man. Macbeth is presented "as a traitor, as a murderer, as a base habitual deceiver, as a monster unhesitating cruelty, a veritable fiend of Scotland." But more important is what is known as the 'tragic flaw' or 'tragic trait' which Aristotle called 'Hamartia', in the character of the hero.

Shakespeare's tragic heroes suffer from some weakness of character which ultimately becomes the cause of the tragedy. In the case of Hamlet, it is indecision, in Othello, suspicion, and jealousy, in Lear, vanity, all in Macbeth, it is ambition. Ambition in itself is not bad but in Macbeth, it is "vaulting ambition." His ambition to become the king of Scotland is fanned and fired by Lady Macbeth, who herself is ambitious, and by the Witches who goad him on the path of murder and 'sin'.

Bradley rightly remarks that Shakespearean tragedy implies the ruin of a great and noble nature through the existence of some serious inherent weakness brought into contact with the special hostile circumstances calculated to defeat it." The next important feature of a Shakespearean tragedy is conflict. Conflict is the essence of it. It manifests itself both in

physical and spiritual forms. In other words, it is both external and internal. Internal conflict is the chief stepping stone to tragedy.

It is by far more serious and moving. The real tragedy of the hero lies not in his external or physical sufferings, but in his mental agony, emotional crisis and spiritual conflict. The final defeat and death of Macbeth is a foregone conclusion. But what is more, moving is the state in which his soul is torn in internal conflict. So acute is his suffering that we know not whether to hate Macbeth or pity him. Equal pity is evoked by Lady Macbeth.

Heart-moving pathos lies in her condition when she walks in sleep, wrings her hand and says, "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Macbeth is a spiritual tragedy in its true sense. Then, the supernatural element plays an important role in the Shakespearean tragedy. Although the catastrophe issues primarily from the hero's character, he is not solely responsible for his doom. The catastrophe is brought about partly through the operation of supernatural powers working.

upon the fate and actions of the hero. In Shakespeare, these supernatural powers take the form of fate, malignant gods, ghosts, witches, apparitions, hallucinations or ominous superstitions. In Macbeth, the supernatural appears in the form of the three Witches, the ghosts of Banquet and, as some critics believe, of Duncan and also in the form of hallucination. The three Witches drive Macbeth on the bloody path of murder and bloodshed.

Their action represents man's helplessness at the hands of unseen powers. Bradley says in this connection, "Shakespeare's conception of tragedy involved, over and above character, the suggestion of fatal forces, operating on the actions of mankind, placing these men of power, nobility, strength, and courage in just those situations with which they are incapable doing." Thus, Macbeth is a characteristic Shakespearean tragedy.

It possesses all the traits of a typical Shakespearean tragedy. As conceived by Shakespeare, Macbeth is concerned with the ruin of the soul of Macbeth. Its subject is the struggle between good and evil, evil dominating for the time being but ultimately defeated by the good.

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