Online Lecture note from Dr. Anita Ghosh; H.O.D. Department of English; R.D. College, Muzaffarpur.

P G Semester-II CC-07, Unit- II Criticism

Theory of Tragedy

(Classical theories)

As the great period of Athenian drama drew to an end at the beginning of the 4th century BCE, Athenian philosophers began to analyze its content and formulate its structure. In the thought of Plato (c. 427–347 BCE), the history of the criticism of tragedy began with speculation on the role of censorship. To Plato (in the dialogue on the Laws) the state was the noblest work of art, a representation (mimēsis) of the fairest and best life. He feared the tragedians' command of the expressive resources of language, which might be used to the detriment of worthwhile institutions. He feared, too, the emotive effect of poetry, the Dionysian element that is at the very basis of tragedy. Therefore, he recommended that the tragedians submit their works to the rulers, for approval, without which they could not be performed. It is clear that tragedy, by nature exploratory, critical, independent, could not live under such a regimen.

Plato is answered, in effect and perhaps intentionally, by Aristotle's Poetics. Aristotle defends the purgative power of tragedy and, in direct contradiction to Plato, makes moral ambiguity the essence of tragedy. The tragic hero must be neither a villain nor a virtuous man but a "character between these two extremes,…a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty [hamartia]." The effect on the audience will be similarly ambiguous. A perfect tragedy, he says, should imitate actions that excite "pity and fear." He uses Sophocles' Oedipus the King as a paradigm. Near the beginning of the play, Oedipus asks how his stricken city (the counterpart of Plato's state) may cleanse itself, and the word he uses for the purifying action is a form of the word catharsis. The concept of catharsis provides Aristotle with his reconciliation with Plato, a means by which to satisfy the claims of both ethics and art. "Tragedy," says Aristotle, "is an imitation [mimēsis] of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude…through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions." Ambiguous means may be employed, Aristotle maintains in contrast to Plato, to a virtuous and purifying end.

Online Lecture note from Dr. Anita Ghosh; H.O.D. Department of English; R.D. College, Muzaffarpur.

To establish the basis for a reconciliation between ethical and artistic demands, Aristotle insists that the principal element in the structure of tragedy is not character but plot. Since the erring protagonist is always in at least partial opposition to the state, the importance of tragedy lies not in the character but in the enlightening event. “Most important of all,” Aristotle said, “is the structure of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation not of men but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality.” Aristotle considered the plot to be the soul of a tragedy, with character in second place. The goal of tragedy is not suffering but the knowledge that issues from it, as the denouement issues from a plot. The most powerful elements of emotional interest in tragedy, according to Aristotle, are reversal of intention or situation (peripeteia) and recognition scenes (anagnōrisis), and each is most effective when it is coincident with the other. In Oedipus, for example, the messenger who brings Oedipus news of his real parentage, intending to allay his fears, brings about a sudden reversal of his fortune, from happiness to misery, by compelling him to recognize that his wife is also his mother.

Later critics found justification for their own predilections in the authority of Greek drama and Aristotle. For example, the Roman poet Horace, in his Ars poetica (Art of Poetry), elaborated the Greek tradition of extensively narrating offstage events into a dictum on decorum forbidding events such as Medea’s butchering of her sons from being performed on stage. And where Aristotle had discussed tragedy as a separate genre, superior to epic poetry, Horace discussed it as a genre with a separate style, again with considerations of decorum foremost. A theme for comedy may not be set forth in verses of tragedy; each style must keep to the place allotted it.

On the basis of this kind of stylistic distinction, the Aeneid, the epic poem of Virgil, Horace’s contemporary, is called a tragedy by the fictional Virgil in Dante’s Divine Comedy, on the grounds that the Aeneid treats only of lofty things. Dante calls his own poem a comedy partly because he includes “low” subjects in it. He makes this distinction in his De vulgari eloquentia (1304–05; “Of Eloquence in the Vulgar”) in which he also declares the subjects fit for the high, tragic style to be salvation, love, and virtue. Despite the presence of these subjects in this poem, he calls it a comedy because his style of language is “careless and humble” and because it is in the vernacular tongue rather than Latin. Dante makes a further distinction:

Comedy…differs from tragedy in its subject matter, in this way, that tragedy in its beginning is admirable and quiet, in its ending or catastrophe fouled and horrible…. From this it is evident why the present work is called a comedy.

Dante's emphasis on the outcome of the struggle rather than on the nature of the struggle is repeated by Chaucer and for the same reason: their belief in the providential nature of human destiny. Like Dante, he was under the influence of De consolatione philosophiae (Consolation of Philosophy), the work of the 6th-century Roman philosopher Boethius that he translated into English. Chaucer considered Fortune to be beyond the influence of the human will. In his Canterbury Tales, he introduces "The Monk's Tale" by defining tragedy as "a certeyn storie… / of him that stood in greet prosperitee, / And is y-fallen out of heigh degree / Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly." Again, he calls his Troilus and Criseyde a tragedy because, in the words of Troilus, "all that comth, comth by necessitee… / That forsight of divine purveyaunce / Hath seyn alwey me to forgon Criseyde."

Elizabethan approaches

The critical tradition of separating the tragic and comic styles is continued by the Elizabethan English poet Sir Philip Sidney, whose **Defence of Poesie** (also published as **An Apologie for Poetrie**) has the distinction of containing the most extended statement on tragedy in the English Renaissance and the misfortune of having been written in the early 1580s (published 1595), before the first plays of Shakespeare, or even of Marlowe. Nevertheless, Sidney wrote eloquently of "high and excellent tragedy, that…with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration teacheth the uncertainty of this world and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded."

Since the word admiration here means awe, Sidney's "admiration and commiseration" are similar to Aristotle's "pity and fear." He differs from Aristotle, however, in preferring epic to tragic poetry. The Renaissance was almost as concerned as Plato with the need to justify poetry on ethical grounds, and Sidney ranks epic higher than tragedy because it provides morally superior models of behaviour.

Sidney goes further than mere agreement with Aristotle, however, in championing the unities of time and place. Aristotle had asserted the need for a unity of time: "Tragedy

endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit." Sidney, following the lead of a 16th-century Italian Neo-classicist, Ludovico Castelvetro, added the unity of place: "The stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day." Sidney also seconds Horace's disapproval of the mingling of styles, which Sidney says produces a "mongrel tragicomedy."

Shakespeare's opinion of the relative merits of the genres is unknown, but his opinion of the problem itself may be surmised. In Hamlet he puts these words in the mouth of the foolish old pedant Polonius: "The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral; scene individable, or poem unlimited" (Act II, scene 2). As to the Classical unities, Shakespeare adheres to them only twice and neither time in a tragedy, in The Comedy of Errors and The Tempest. And through the mouths of his characters, Shakespeare, like Aristotle, puts himself on both sides of the central question of tragic destiny—that of freedom and necessity. Aristotle says that a tragic destiny is precipitated by the hero's tragic fault, his "error or frailty" (hamartia), but Aristotle also calls this turn of events a change of "fortune." Shakespeare's Cassius in Julius Caesar says, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves," and, in King Lear, Edmund ridicules a belief in fortune as the "foppery of the world." But Hamlet, in a comment on the nature of hamartia, is a fatalist when he broods on the "mole of nature," the "one defect" that some men are born with, "wherein they are not guilty," and that brings them to disaster (Act I, scene 4). Similarly, Sophocles' Oedipus, though he says, "It was Apollo who brought my woes to pass," immediately adds, "it was my hand that struck my eyes." These ambiguities are a powerful source of the tragic emotion of Athenian and Elizabethan drama, unequalled by traditions that are more sure of themselves, such as French Neoclassicism, or less sure of themselves, such as 20th-century drama.

Neo-Classical theory

In the Neoclassical period Aristotle's reasonableness was replaced by rationality, and his moral ambiguity by the mechanics of "poetic justice." In the 17th century, under the guise of a strict adherence to Classical formulas, additional influences were brought to bear on the theory of tragedy. In France, the theological doctrine of Jansenism, which called for an

extreme orthodoxy, exercised a strong influence. In England, the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, with the reopening of the theatres, introduced a period of witty and lusty literature. In both nations, the influence of natural law—the idea that laws binding upon humanity are inferable from nature—increased, along with the influence of the exact sciences. Critics in both nations declared that Aristotle's "rules" were made to reduce nature into a method.

In his 1679 preface to Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, Dryden says, "we lament not, but detest a wicked man, we are glad when we behold his crimes are punished, and that Poetical justice is done upon him." Similar sentiments, calling for the punishment of crimes and the reward of virtue, were expressed in France. Catharsis had become vindication. Thomas Rymer, one of the most influential English critics of the time, in The Tragedies of The Last Age (1678), wrote that

besides the purging of the passions, something must stick by observing…that necessary relation and chain, whereby the causes and the effects, the vertues and rewards, the vices and their punishments are proportion'd and link'd together, how deep and dark so ever are laid the Springs, and however intricate and involved are their operations.

The effect was to rob tragedy of a great deal of its darkness and depth. The temper of the age demanded that mystery be brought to the surface and to the light, a process that had effects not merely different from but in part antipathetic to tragedy. Nicolas Boileau, the chief spokesman of the French Neoclassical movement, in his discussion of pity and fear in Art Poétique (1674), qualified these terms with the adjectives beguiling and pleasant (pitié charmante, douce terreur), which radically changed their meaning. The purged spectator became a grateful patient.

In his preface to Phèdre (1677), Racine subscribed to the quid pro quo view of retribution.

I have written no play in which virtue has been more celebrated than in this one. The smallest faults are here severely punished; the mere idea of a crime is looked upon with as much horror as the crime itself.

Of Phèdre herself, his greatest heroine, he says, I have taken the trouble to make her a little less hateful than she is in the ancient versions of this tragedy, in which she herself resolves to

accuse Hippolytus. I judged that that calumny had about it something too base and black to be put into the mouth of a Princess…. This depravity seemed to me more appropriate to the character of a nurse, whose inclinations might be supposed to be more servile.

For Aristotle, pity and fear made a counterpoint typical of Classicism, each tempering the other to create a balance. For Racine, pity and fear each must be tempered in itself. In the marginalia to his fragmentary translation of Aristotle's Poetics, Racine wrote that in arousing the passions of pity and fear, tragedy removes from them whatever they have of the excessive and the vicious and brings them back to a moderated condition and conformable to reason.

Corneille contradicted Aristotle outright. Discussing Le Cid he said, in A Discourse on Tragedy (1660),

Our pity ought to give us fear of falling into similar misfortune, and purge us of that excess of love which is the cause of their disaster…but I do not know that it gives us that, or purges us, and I am afraid that the reasoning of Aristotle on this point is but a pretty idea…it is not requisite that these two passions always serve together…it suffices…that one of the two bring about the purgation.

The accommodation of tragedy to Neo-Classical ideas of order demanded a simplification of tragedy's complexities and ambiguities. The simplifying process was now inspired, however, by the fundamental tenet of all primitive scientific thought namely, that orderliness and naturalness are in a directly proportionate relationship. Racine declared the basis of the naturalistic effect in drama to be a strict adherence to the unities, which now seem the opposite of naturalistic. In his preface to Bérénice (1670), he asked what probability there could be when a multitude of things that would scarcely happen in several weeks are made to happen in a day. The illusion of probability, which is the Aristotelian criterion for the verisimilitude of a stage occurrence, is made to sound as if it were the result of a strict dramaturgical determinism, on the grounds that necessity is the truest path to freedom.

Racine and Corneille both contradicted Dante and Chaucer on the indispensability of a catastrophic final scene. "Blood and deaths," said Racine, are not necessary, for "it is enough that the action be grand, that the actors be heroic, that the passions be aroused" to produce "that stately sorrow that makes the whole pleasure of tragedy" (preface to Bérénice).

Milton was artistically much more conservative. He prefaced his Samson Agonistes (1671) with a warning against the error of intermixing Comic stuff with Tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons: which by all judicious hath been counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people.

He bypassed Shakespeare for the ancients and ranked Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as tragic poets unequalled yet by any others. Part of the rule, for Milton, was that which affirmed the unities. In his concurrence with the Classical idea of the purgative effect of pity and fear, Milton combined reactionary aesthetics with the scientific spirit of the recently formed Royal Society.

Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion [Aristotle on catharsis]: for so, in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours.

Dryden spoke against a delimiting conception of either the genres or the unities. Speaking in the guise of Neander in Of Dramatick Poesie, an Essay (1668), he said that it was to the honour of our nation, that we have invented, increased, and perfected a more pleasant way of writing for the stage, than was ever known to the ancients or moderns of any nation, which is tragi-comedy.

The French dramatists, he felt, through their observance of the unities of time and place, wrote plays characterized by a dearth of plot and narrowness of imagination. Racine's approach to the question of probability was turned completely around by Dryden, who asked:

How many beautiful accidents might naturally happen in two or three days, which cannot arrive with any probability in the compass of twenty-four hours?

The definitive critique of Neoclassical restrictions was not formulated, however, until the following century, when it was made by Samuel Johnson and was, significantly, part of his 1765 preface to Shakespeare, the first major step in the long process of establishing Shakespeare as the preeminent tragic poet of post-Classical drama. On genre he wrote:

Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind;…expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of

one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend…. That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature.

And on the unities:

The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible. [But] the objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria, and the next at Rome, supposes, that when the play opens, the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria…. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more.

Johnson's appeal to nature was the essence of subsequent Romantic criticism.

Romantic theories

Lessing was the first important Romantic critic. He stated one of Romanticism's chief innovations in his Hamburg Dramaturgy (1767–69):

The names of princes and heroes can lend pomp and majesty to a play, but they contribute nothing to our emotion. The misfortune of those whose circumstances most resemble our own, must naturally penetrate most deeply into our hearts, and if we pity kings, we pity them as human beings, not as kings.

Within a generation, revolutions in Europe and America offered social expression of this literary precept, and a dramatic tradition dominant for 22 centuries was upturned. From the time of Aristotle, who thought that the tragic hero should be highly renowned and prosperous, the tragic hero had been an aristocrat, if not a man of royal blood. With the exception of their minor or peripheral characters, the tragic dramas of Athens, England, and France told nothing of the destinies of the mass of humankind. All this was now changed.

Coleridge

But it is not certain that what was good for the revolution was good for tragedy. Coleridge in his critical writings of 1808–18 said that:

there are two forms of disease most preclusive of tragic worth. The first [is] a sense and love of the ludicrous, and a diseased sensibility of the assimilating power…that in the boldest bursts of passion will lie in wait, or at once kindle into jest…. The second cause is matter of exultation to the philanthropist and philosopher, and of regret to the poet…namely, the security, comparative equability, and ever-increasing sameness of human life.

In accord with this distaste for an excess of the mundane, Coleridge attacked the new German tragedies in which "the dramatist becomes a novelist in his directions to the actors, and degrades tragedy to pantomime." To describe, or rather indicate, what tragedy should ideally be, Coleridge said "it is not a copy of nature; but it is an imitation."

Coleridge's operative words and phrases in his discussions of tragedy were "innate," "from within," "implicit," "the being within," "the inmost heart," "our inward nature," "internal emotions," and "retired recesses." The new philosophical dispensation in Coleridge, like the new social dispensation in Lessing, reversed the old priorities; and where there were once princes there were now burghers, and where there were once the ordinances of God and the state there were now the dictates of the heart. By means of this reversal, Coleridge effected a reconciliation of the "tragedy of fate" and the "tragedy of character" in his description of the force of fate as merely the embodiment of an interior compulsion different in scale but not in kind from the interior compulsions of character. In Classical tragedy, he said the human "will" was "exhibited as struggling with fate, a great and beautiful instance and illustration of which is the Prometheus of Aeschylus; and the deepest effect is produced, when the fate is represented as a higher and intelligent will."

According to Coleridge, Shakespeare used the imaginative "variety" that characterizes man's inward nature in place of the mechanical regularity of the Neoclassical unities to produce plays that were "neither tragedies nor comedies, nor both in one, but a different genus, diverse in kind, not merely different in degree—romantic dramas or dramatic romances." In his preoccupation with the mixture of genres and his distinction between the "mechanical" (Neoclassicism) and the "organic" (Shakespeare), Coleridge was influenced by Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature (delivered 1808–09, published 1809–11), by August Wilhelm von Schlegel, perhaps the most influential of German Romantic critics.

Schlegel

Like Coleridge and most Romantic critics of tragedy, Schlegel found his champion in Shakespeare, and, also like them, he was preoccupied with the contrast between Classic and Romantic. Like Coleridge, Schlegel emphasized Shakespeare's inwardness, what Coleridge called his "implicit wisdom deeper even than our consciousness." It is in Shakespeare's most profound insights that Schlegel locates one of the principal distinctions between Classical and Shakespearean tragedy, in what he calls Shakespeare's "secret irony." The irony in Oedipus the King consists in the relation between the audience's knowledge of the protagonist's situation and his own ignorance of it. But Shakespeare's "readiness to remark the mind's fainter and involuntary utterances" is so great, says Schlegel, that "nobody ever painted so truthfully as he has done the facility of self-deception, the half self-conscious hypocrisy towards ourselves, with which even noble minds attempt to disguise the almost inevitable influence of selfish motives in human nature."

The irony Schlegel sees in Shakespeare's characterizations also extends to the whole of the action, as well as to the separate characters. In his discussion of it he suggests the reason for the difficulty of Shakespeare's plays and for the quarrelsome, irreconcilable "interpretations" among Shakespeare's commentators:

Most poets who portray human events in a narrative or dramatic form take themselves apart, and exact from their readers a blind approbation or condemnation of whatever side they choose to support or oppose.… When, however, by a dexterous manoeuvre, the poet allows us an occasional glance at the less brilliant reverse of the medal, then he makes, as it were, a sort of secret understanding with the select circle of the more intelligent of his readers or spectators; he shows them that he had previously seen and admitted the validity of their tacit objections; that he himself is not tied down to the represented subject but soars freely above it.

In Greek tragedy, the commentary by the chorus was an explicit and objective fact of the drama itself. In the presentation of Shakespeare's plays, such a commentary is carried on in the separate minds of the spectators, where it is diffused, silent, and not entirely sure of itself. When the spectators speak their minds after the curtain falls, it is not surprising that they often disagree.

Online Lecture note from Dr. Anita Ghosh; H.O.D. Department of English; R.D. College, Muzaffarpur.

In Oedipus the King, which Aristotle cited as the model of Classical tragedy, the irony of the protagonist's situation is evident to the spectator. In Hamlet, however, according to the American philosopher George Santayana, writing in 1908, it is the secret ironies, half-lights, and self-contradictions that make it the central creation of Romantic tragedy. As has been noted, Coleridge objected to the dramatist's giving directions to the actors, but part of the price of not having them is to deny to the audience as well an explicit indication of the playwright's meaning

Hegel

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the immensely influential German philosopher, in his Aesthetics (1820–29), proposed that the sufferings of the tragic hero are merely a means of reconciling opposing moral claims. The operation is a success because of, not in spite of, the fact that the patient dies. According to Hegel's account of Greek tragedy, the conflict is not between good and evil but between goods that are each making too exclusive a claim. The heroes of ancient tragedy, by adhering to the one ethical system by which they moulded their own personality, must come into conflict with the ethical claims of another. It is the moral one-sidedness of the tragic actor, not any negatively tragic fault in his morality or in the forces opposed to him, that proves his undoing, for both sides of the contradiction, if taken by themselves, are justified.

The nuclear Greek tragedy for Hegel is, understandably, Sophocles' Antigone, with its conflict between the valid claims of conscience (Antigone's obligation to give her brother a suitable burial) and law (King Creon's edict that enemies of the state should not be allowed burial). The two claims represent what Hegel regards as essentially concordant ethical claims. Antigone and Creon are, in this view, rather like pawns in the Hegelian dialectic—his theory that thought progresses from a thesis (i.e., an idea), through an antithesis (an idea opposing the original thesis), to a synthesis (a more comprehensive idea that embraces both the thesis and antithesis), which in turn becomes the thesis in a further progression. At the end of Antigone, something of the sense of mutually appeased, if not concordant, forces does obtain after Antigone's suicide and the destruction of Creon's family. Thus, in contrast to Aristotle's statement that the tragic actors should represent not an extreme of good or evil but something between, Hegel would have them too good to live; that is, too extreme an

embodiment of a particular good to survive in the world. He also tends to dismiss other traditional categories of tragic theory. For instance, he prefers his own kind of catharsis to Aristotle's—the feeling of reconciliation.

Hegel's emphasis on the correction of moral imbalances in tragedy is reminiscent of the "poetic justice" of Neo-Classical theory, with its similar dialectic of crime and punishment. He sounds remarkably like Racine when he claims that, in the tragic denouement, the necessity of all that has been experienced by particular individuals is seen to be in complete accord with reason and is harmonized on a true ethical basis. But where the Neoclassicists were preoccupied with the unities of time and place, Hegel's concerns, like those of other Romantics, are inward. For him, the final issue of tragedy is not the misfortune and suffering of the tragic antagonists but rather the satisfaction of spirit arising from "reconciliation." Thus, the workings of the spirit, in Hegel's view, are subject to the rationalistic universal laws.

Hegel's system is not applicable to Shakespearean or Romantic tragedy. Such Shakespearean heroes as Macbeth, Richard III, and Mark Antony cannot be regarded as embodiments of any transcendent good. They behave as they do, says Hegel, now speaking outside of his scheme of tragedy, simply because they are the kind of men they are. In a statement pointing up the essence of uninhibited romantic lust and willfulness Hegel said: "it is the inner experience of their heart and individual emotion, or the particular qualities of their personality, which insist on satisfaction."

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche

The traditional categories of tragedy are nearly destroyed in the deepened subjectivities of Romanticism of the 19th-century German philosophers, Arthur Schopenhauer and his disciple Friedrich Nietzsche. In Schopenhauer's The World as Will and Idea (1819), much more than the social or ethical order is upturned. In place of God, the good, reason, soul, or heart, Schopenhauer installs the will, as reality's true inner nature, the metaphysical to everything physical in the world. In Schopenhauer, there is no question of a Hegelian struggle to achieve a more comprehensive good. There is rather the strife of will with itself, manifested by fate in the form of chance and error and by the tragic personages themselves. Both fate and humanity represent one and the same will, which lives and appears

in them all. Its individual manifestations, however, in the form of such phenomena as chances, errors, or individuals, fight against and destroy each other.

Schopenhauer accordingly rejects the idea of poetic justice: "The demand for so-called poetical justice rests on entire misconception of the nature of tragedy, and, indeed, of the nature of the world itself.… The true sense of tragedy is the deeper insight, that it is not his own individual sins that the hero atones for, but original sin, i.e., the crime of existence itself." Schopenhauer distinguishes three types of tragic representation: (1) "by means of a character of extraordinary wickedness…who becomes the author of the misfortune," (2) "blind fate—i.e., chance and error" (such as the title characters in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and "most of the tragedies of the ancients"), and (3) when "characters of ordinary morality…are so situated with regard to each other that their position compels them, knowingly and with their eyes open, to do each other the greatest injury, without any one of them being entirely in the wrong" (such as, "to a certain extent," Hamlet).

This last kind of tragedy seems to Schopenhauer far to surpass the other two. His reason, almost too grim to record, is that it provides the widest possible play to the destructive manifestations of the will. It brings tragedy, so to speak, closest to home.

Schopenhauer finds tragedy to be the summit of poetical art, because of the greatness of its effect and the difficulty of its achievement. According to Schopenhauer, the egoism of the protagonist is purified by suffering almost to the purity of nihilism. His personal motives become dispersed as his insight into them grows; "the complete knowledge of the nature of the world, which has a quieting effect on the will, produces resignation, the surrender not merely of life, but of the very will to live."

Schopenhauer's description has limited application to tragic denouements in general. In the case of his own archetypal hero, the hero's end seems merely the mirror image of his career, an oblivion of resignation or death that follows an oblivion of violence. Instead of a dialogue between higher and lower worlds of morality or feeling (which take place even in Shakespeare's darkest plays), Schopenhauer posits a succession of states as helpless in knowledge as in blindness. His "will" becomes a synonym for all that is possessed and necessity-ridden.

Online Lecture note from Dr. Anita Ghosh; H.O.D. Department of English; R.D. College, Muzaffarpur.

Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music (1872) was deeply influenced by Schopenhauer. The two elements of tragedy, says Nietzsche, are the Apollonian (related to the Greek god Apollo, here used as a symbol of measured restraint) and the Dionysian (from Dionysus, the Greek god of ecstasy). His conception of the Apollonian is the equivalent of what Schopenhauer calls the individual phenomenon—the particular chance, error, or person, the individuality of which is merely a mask for the essential truth of reality which it conceals. The Dionysian element is a sense of universal reality, which, according to Schopenhauer, is experienced after the loss of individual egoism. The "Dionysian ecstasy," as defined by Nietzsche, is experienced "not as individuals but as the one living being, with whose creative joy we are united."

Nietzsche dismisses out of hand one of the most venerable features of the criticism of tragedy, the attempt to reconcile the claims of ethics and art. He says that the events of a tragedy are "supposed" to discharge pity and fear and are "supposed" to elevate and inspire by the triumph of noble principles at the sacrifice of the hero. But art, he says, must demand purity within its own sphere. To explain tragic myth, the first requirement is to seek the pleasure that is peculiar to it in the purely aesthetic sphere, without bringing in pity, fear, or the morally sublime.

The essence of this specifically aesthetic tragic effect is that it both reveals and conceals, causing both pain and joy. The drama's exhibition of the phenomena of suffering individuals (Apollonian elements) forces upon the audience "the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena," which in turn communicates "the exuberant fertility of the universal." The spectators then "become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence, and…we anticipate, in Dionysian ecstasy, the indestructibility and eternity of this joy." Thus, he says, there is a desire "to see tragedy and at the same time to get beyond all seeing…to hear and at the same time long to get beyond all hearing."

The inspired force of Nietzsche's vision is mingled with a sense of nihilism:

"Only after the spirit of science has been pursued to its limits,…may we hope for a rebirth of tragedy…I understand by the spirit of science the faith that first came to light in the person of Socrates—the faith in the explicability of nature and in knowledge as a panacea."

Nietzsche would replace the spirit of science with a conception of existence and the world as an aesthetic phenomenon and justified only as such. Tragedy would enjoy a prominent propagandistic place. It is "precisely the tragic myth that has to convince us that even the ugly and disharmonic are part of an artistic game that the will in the eternal amplitude of its pleasure plays with itself." And, consummately: "we have art in order that we may not perish through truth."

Tragedy in music

Musical dissonance was Nietzsche's model for the double effect of tragedy. The title of the first edition of his book, The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music, was also influenced by Schopenhauer, for whom music differed from all the other arts in that it is not a copy of a phenomenon but the direct copy of the will itself. He even called the world "embodied music…embodied will." Nietzsche's theorizing on the relation of the tragic theme to art forms other than the drama was in fact confirmed in such operas as Mussorgsky's version of Pushkin's tragedy Boris Godunov, Verdi's of Macbeth and Othello, and Gounod's Faust. In contrast to these resettings of received forms, Wagner, Verdi, and Bizet achieved a new kind of tragic power for Romanticism in the theme of the operatic love-death in, respectively, Tristan and Isolde, Aida, and Carmen. Thus, the previous progression of the genre from tragedy to tragicomedy to romantic tragedy continued to a literary-musical embodiment of what Nietzsche called "tragic dithyrambs."

An earlier prophecy than Nietzsche's regarding tragedy and opera was made by the German poet Friedrich von Schiller in a letter of 1797 to Goethe:

I have always trusted that out of opera, as out of the choruses of the ancient festival of Bacchus, tragedy would liberate itself and develop in a nobler form. In opera, servile imitation of nature is dispensed with…here is…the avenue by which the ideal can steal its way back into the theatre.