

Abstract

After thorough study of Shakespeare's four great tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth, I have found that Shakespeare's tragedies fit into a general formula that all the protagonists have made some kind of misjudgement under their singular circumstances, and as a consequence, they all receive harsh punishments and many sufferings. Finally, the protagonists gain their recognition. From their recognition, they repossess their nobility, which bring about conciliation between the parties they have wronged. My focal point is by using the well-known protagonists, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth as examples in my thesis to show the importance of courage and humanity in all of us.

In order to prove my point in the first paragraph I have found that Shakespeare's tragedies were greatly influenced by The Classic period, especially by the works of Lucius Annaeus Seneca. Seneca's writing techniques, including the use of soliloquies and monologues are modeled by many playwrights in the Renaissance, including Shakespeare. Other influences we can detect, such as the scenes of violence and horror, the involvement into the supernatural worlds. However, Shakespeare creates most elements in his tragedies. For example, the four tragedies have their own background and circumstances which lead the four protagonists to judge wrongly. Also all four plays interweave inextricably the national and domestic problems, and the four protagonists have their reconciliations at the end.

Furthermore, misjudgement tends to be a psychological phenomenon. In order to psychoanalyze the four protagonists, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth, Freud's theories about the three psychic zones of the id, the ego, and the superego will be used. Moreover, I shall use Hegel's ideas of tragedy to look into the four great tragedies. By this, we can offer another interpretation of Shakespeare's four great

tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth.

In Chapter One, I will describe the reasons why I choose misjudgements of the four protagonists in the four Shakespeare's tragedies as my focal point, and will briefly discuss the dissimilarities between Shakespearean tragedy and Greek and Roman tragedy.

In Chapter Two, I will point out the causes of the misjudgements of the four protagonists, as they fail to realize the difference between appearance and reality. Furthermore, I shall apply the theories and ideas of Freud and psychoanalyze the protagonists.

In Chapter Three, I will point out how the misjudgements change the protagonists' characters and eventually bring death and destruction domestically and nationally. Moreover, I will state how the four protagonists' misjudgements bring them torturous sufferings and punishments because they are both victims and victimizers.

In Chapter Four, I will discuss how the four protagonists gain their recognitions; how the catastrophes and destruction lead to their final reconciliations; and how the nobility of the four protagonists is restored at the end.

Chapter Five concludes the understandings and knowledge I gained from writing this dissertation.

Ben Jonson's claim that Shakespeare is not of an age but for all time has been continuously endorsed in different ways. The greatness of these plays has been acknowledged for centuries by audience and readers in diverse cultures for the reason that Shakespeare not only engaged with but went through and beyond the contemporary to capture in brilliantly realized characters and deeply moving scenes some of the most persistent aspects of human nature and experience: the strength and

the vulnerability, the goodness and the wickedness, of men and women; the desolation and courage of the individual at odds with society; the cruel injustices and the terrifying uncertainty of life itself. (McAlindon 21)

