

Chapter 1: The theory of tragedy: a historical perspective

"Noble are the men who can weep. Leave me alone - you who have a dry heart and dry eyes! I curse the happy for whom the unhappy is only a spectacle" (Goethe in Elective Affinities, 1809).

1.1 What is tragedy?

"Tragedy... is impossible to define satisfactorily", Draper (11) asserts. This difficulty is the result of the evolving sentiments surrounding tragedy. The significance of tragedy has changed in every age, as in every age society has differed in terms of political, economic and moral standards, and of what it has considered significant. If one accepts the view that tragedy is an imitation or "mimesis" of reality, or, as Aristotle says, the imitation of an action, then it follows that since the perception of realities has changed through time, the nature of tragedy must have changed.

Lodge (1953: 170) differentiates Plato's concept of mimesis into general and special senses. In a general sense, any artist is capable of miming, representing or copying whatever he is trying to reproduce. This can be a sculptor imitating reality in his sculpture, a painter imitating reality in painting, or a literary work being created as the imitation of the author's perception of reality. The artist tries to reproduce reality as

accurately as possible. However, since reality is flawed, this art must necessarily be flawed. Truth to life, not pleasure obtained, must be the condition by which to measure this mimesis in the general sense. The responsibility of the artist here is merely to represent reality as truly as possible. Perhaps Loman, with all his flaws, can be seen as a tragic hero, a person who represents reality as truly as possible - who represents flawed reality. If one accepts this hypothesis, then the "traditional" tragic hero, who is a man of higher stature, can be seen as representing the ideal reality. Since perception of realities has changed, tragic heroes, representing reality, must therefore change in character.

Mimesis in the special sense results from an inspiration of the author or artist. He "reaches out into what is beyond human control... He is feeling after guidance, entrusting himself to what he believes to be the higher spiritual powers" (Lodge: 174). A turning away from the superficial, to the transcendental occurs until an understanding of the ideal reality is acquired and imparted onto paper or canvas. This is thus the reality of the ideal, and is the highest form of art. This ideal is represented as that which all can admire and for which all can strive.

One may thus deduce that this is the basis for the traditional concept of the tragic hero. A person (hero) has ideal characteristics, for which others can strive, yet since perfection does not exist, this hero must have a fundamental flaw in his personality, beliefs, or behaviour, which results in his death. The responsibility of the artist is to ensure that the qualities and values of the tragic hero are those which that society holds as important and virtuous, so that the audience can learn from the tragic hero's suffering, and can experience a *catharsis* (cleansing) of terror and pity. Thus a

traditional tragic hero embodies the qualities and values of a particular society. As societies change, so do their values, and so must those embodied by the tragic hero. A tragic protagonist undergoes a crisis, a conflict, or a struggle, resulting in a response from Miller, as will later be investigated, gives Loman in Death of a Salesman the qualities of a normal working person, not qualities others would wish to imitate. His passionate clinging to his principles and phoney dream is admirable in its intensity, but not in its blindness. Yet Miller has imitated society's reality in the portrayal of Loman. Can Loman be classified as a tragic hero? Has the definition of tragedy and the tragic hero changed enough to encompass this man? Surely Loman can be said to represent reality in Plato's general sense, in other words, to represent reality truthfully, with all its flaws? Does the tragic hero have to represent reality in the special sense? Are both mimeses acceptable? As society changes, the character of the tragic hero, because it involves a reflection of reality, will change, in both the special or general senses of mimesis. Yet, underlying the surface changes that make the hero relevant to the context in which he is created, the tragic hero still possesses timeless human qualities and traits.

Before these questions can be answered and a general definition of tragedy determined, it is necessary to examine how tragedy has changed and evolved through the centuries in relation to the changes in society. There have been many changes through the eras, relating to what is meant by tragedy. The society of each era has contributed to these changes, yet three aspects or considerations, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1.4, The impact of a changing society on the artist, particularly the tragic playwright, and his works, seem to be foremost in the debate concerning whether or not modern drama can be tragic. The first aspect is the seriousness and dignity of the content and in the presentation of the hero (and

whether prose or poetry is used). The second concerns the nature and significance of the tragic hero (his character and flaw), and the last aspect is the suffering that the tragic protagonist undergoes within a basic moral force, resulting in a response from the audience.

Tragedy thus reflects perceptions of reality, whether in the general or special senses of mimesis. As societies have undergone changes and growth in ideologies and values, so has the perception of reality changed, thus changing the concept of the tragic dramatic hero. There are, as said, three constituents of tragedy that have formed the basic idea of tragedy throughout history, and that continue to do so.

1.2 The history of the concept of tragedy

The concept of tragedy has fluctuated and been modified through time, according to the personal views of the authors of each era and the political, economic and social climates of each age.

The earliest age from which we have records of tragic drama, is the fifth century BC in Greece. Here tragic drama originally started in the form of a choral song in honour of the god, Dionysus; this then developed into an alternation between an actor's speech and the chorus. Tragedy, in these productions, was a vague idea. "It presented terrible things about great people... [it] told of man's subjection to the gods... of the fact that through suffering men had the opportunity to grow" (Leech 1986: 12-13). The Greeks were polytheists, "believing in hundreds of deities" (Greer: 56) and cited them as the reason for inexplicable events or suffering.

Dixon (14) further clarifies the Greek religious perspective:

Greek tragedy rested on a sacred ritual, dealt with a sacred legend, was performed in a sacred place and in honour of a sacred person. [The Hellenes tended] to identify morals with piety, to think of the good man as the religious man, a worshipper, and above all, to see life always in its setting, mysterious and divine in its manifestations.

The gods were thus very prominent in that society, as opposed to modern society, and they were held responsible for what society still tends to call fate. Greer (56) elucidates the importance of religion in A Brief History of the Western World. He says that religion "ordered the daily lives of citizens, inasmuch as the community undertook no important act without giving thought to the gods." Furthermore, Dixon (30) continues to explain that the themes of Greek tragedies were lofty, concerned "with man's cosmic attachments, his relation to the gods and the eternal laws." The religious beliefs of fifth century BC Greek society dominated its concept of tragedy.

It is interesting to note the parallel between the themes of Greek tragedies, and Miller's notion of theme. In arguing the question of rank, Miller allows for the common man to attain the role of tragic hero, providing that his life and/ or career

...engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationship of man to God - the questions... whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground or a fog in which disembodied spirits pass each other in an endless twilight (Gomez: 61).

Tragedy, by the fourth century BC, had become more popular, but more importantly, the idea of logic became more prominent, resulting in Aristotle's attempt to set down certain descriptive guidelines for the writing of tragic drama. The deductions Aristotle makes about tragic drama in his Poetics, are not meant to be prescriptive, though. They were written in an attempt to explain how tragedy operated in the Hellenic era.

Leech (14) clarifies this statement:

In the fourth century, Aristotle wrote The Poetics.... He deduced from the tragedies he had seen and read that there were certain general characteristics of the tragic hero, of the effect of tragedy, of the time-span of a single tragedy, and also of the structural devices commonly used in tragic writing.

Although Aristotle's suggestions were made centuries ago, his analysis is often used as a springboard when discussing tragedy. His theories are open to criticism because, as Dixon (25) points out: "Aristotle assumes that tragedy and drama can be scientifically analysed; he accepts the world as open to logical interpretation, but this is not so.... Not everything can be logically explained." Dixon reflects the modern, post World War I, sense of chaos and disintegration. Greer (65) corroborates Dixon's point about Aristotle. "To Aristotle, logic is the indispensable key to truth and happiness. For this reason, he worked out precise and systematic rules for logical thinking..."

The need to explain everything logically was not only limited to Aristotle; it prevailed in that society. There was an increased interest in, for example, biology, the sciences and philosophy. There was an attitude that the world could be explained scientifically, and events that could not be explained, were attributed to the will of the gods.

Greek society's view of life is reflected in the structured form of the dramas, as defined by Aristotle, as well as in the content. Poetry was the accepted vehicle of expression. The tragic hero had admirable qualities, marred by a tragic error, and the hero suffered. The audience, too, experienced a pleasurable cleansing or catharsis of pity and terror. As to the theme of tragedies, "the connection with Dionysus [gradually] faded away, and writers of tragedy were allowed to choose whatever serious themes suited their purpose... [although] tragedy remained moral in purpose

and character" (Greer: 68). Already, within Greek society, one can see a change in tragic drama.

The Roman Empire, which succeeded the Greek, existed for centuries and as it developed, the taste in literature changed. Horace's patriotic verses, for example, "consistently reflect the spirit of the Augustan revival and sing of the destiny of Rome" (Greer: 105), whereas Latin tragedies, especially those written by the philosopher, Seneca, consisted of violent imagery and subject matter (Leech: 15). Greer (105) explains that Seneca "emphasised passion and horror in his plays [to cater] to the Roman taste for plotting and violence." At that time, the first century AD, Nero reigned; he delighted in lighting up the streets with human torches - Christians set alight. Roman literature thus reflects the qualities of mind and situation of the time in which it was written.

From the third century AD, when Constantine declared toleration for the Christians, the spread of Christianity accelerated, so that tragedies soon had the dissemination of religious principles as their main didactic aim. Dramas were used firstly as a vehicle for presenting Christian interpretations of world history, then to present moral lessons in order to save souls. The tragic moments in these dramas were simply when the audience was made aware of the lamentable. Leech (15) reveals that a tragedy was a story with a sad ending, serving to warn the audience that they, too, would end up unhappily if they were not careful. This is clearly a deviation from Aristotelian principles.

During the sixth and seventh centuries, Isidore of Seville defined tragedy as consisting of "sad stories of commonwealth and kings" (Leech: 2). The dignity of the

story and the qualities of the tragic protagonist were ensured, as the hero was a man of higher status, whose life ended sadly. Kingdoms, such as that of the Franks, prevailed in Empires at the time, so it was fitting that esteemed rulers be subjects for tragedies.

By the Middle Ages, tragedy had little to do with drama and performance. It simply described a certain type of narrative (Leech: 15). John of Garland, who lived around the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, described tragedy as "a poem written in the grand style, which treats of shameful and wicked deeds, and, beginning in joy, ends in grief" (Leech: 2). Here there was a certain dignity or grandness; it was written in poetry and ended sadly.

The progress, or rather alteration, of tragedy has so far been discussed with reference to non-English societies. Steiner (11) maintains that "the word tragedy [only] entered the English language in the later years of the 14th century." Chaucer gave a definition of it in the Prologue to the Monk's Tale in The Canterbury Tales. His definition is:

Tragedy is to say a certain story
 From ancient books which have preserved the glory
 Of one that stood in great prosperity
 And is now fallen out of high degree
 In misery, where he ends wretchedly (Chaucer 1988: 239).

There is no implication here of dramatic form. A tragedy is a narrative recounting the life of an eminent person who suffers a downfall of fortune and ends disastrously. It is interesting to note that Chaucer served the English Aristocracy for most of his life, so that he was respectful of the distinguished aristocracy. He also travelled and read extensively and this markedly affected his outlook and writings. Greer (231) contends that Chaucer "displayed a rare combination of scholarship, insight and

humour... his outlook was cosmopolitan and urbane." Understanding Chaucer's context enriches a person's understanding of the literature he wrote. The Canterbury Tales were popular among all literate people of his time. In the stories, "as in a mirror, [the people] could see themselves and their society" (Greer: 231). This is relevant as it demonstrates how his writing reflects Chaucer's society.

The society of Italy in the sixteenth century, the Renaissance period, saw a revival of interest in art and experimentation with art forms, as well as a rediscovery of the classics. Tragic drama was no exception. Seneca's dramas from the first century AD were performed, Greek dramas were adapted and performed and new dramas blended both classical and modern (or "romanti") form and subject matter. It was especially the authority and horror of Seneca's plays which were imitated in the creation of new dramas, possibly because there was a general feeling of daring and bravery when it came to art. Steiner (16) observes: "The rediscovery of Senecan drama during the 1560's gave to the word [tragedy] clear implications of theatrical form. Henceforth, a tragedy is a play dealing with tragic matters".

Italian theorists at this time, such as Vida and Catelvetro, expounded The Poetics, studied and adapted the principles in Horace's Ars Poetica and imposed strict rules for writers, returning to the descriptions of Aristotle (Leech: 18). Draper (16) also comments that Aristotle's suggestions concerning the custom of Greek theatre were given "a codified formalisation, which isolated them from the conditions to which they were appropriate". In other words, Aristotle's outlines concerning Greek theatre were taken out of their context, and were considered as the undisputed precepts in the writing and appraisal of tragic drama. Since Shakespeare's works conform to a large

extent to Aristotle's principles, this may have done a lot to enshrine Aristotle's principles as authoritative.

There have been a number of developments in the concept of tragedy in English society; they can all be linked to changes in the political, economic or social circumstances of the time. Gorboduc, which used to be known as "The first English Tragedy", was written by Sackville and Norton in 1561. It was, Leech (15-16) illustrates, more of a didactic political play on proper government, than a tragedy. Yet this shows the increased interest in tragic drama during the Renaissance period.

Sidney (1554-1586), in An Apology for Poetry, also defines tragedy. According to him, it is:

...the high and excellent Tragedie that openeth the greatest wounds, and sheweth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the effects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded (Sidney 1923: 23).

Sidney here implies that admiration and warning should be facets of tragic writing, whereas Chapman (1559-1634) declares that "tragedy is primarily a thing of moral purpose, encouraging us to cultivate the good and avoid the contrary" (Leech: 16), giving it a didactic purpose.

From this, it is evident that there is no fixed definition of tragedy. Writers interpret tragedy as they understand it, not necessarily as Aristotle concludes. Marlowe, in 1590, published his Tamburlaine as "Devided into two Tragicall Discourses". Tragedy was also used loosely in the division of Shakespeare's 1623 Folio into comedies, histories and tragedies (Leech: 16). Dixon (25) adds that "by

Shakespeare's day, the long alliance between religion and drama had come to an end, and so complete was its secularisation that no trace of his theatre's origin could have been so much as suspected by an Elizabethan audience." It seems as though each author had his own explication of the word tragedy.

On the other hand, Potter (128) draws parallels among the tragic plays of Shakespeare, Chapman and Middleton, all dramatists from the Jacobean Period:

...if these plays had anything in common, then it was a powerful sense of the misery and misfortune of human life, and the pain of struggling against forces too great for even the tragic hero to overcome. These forces were either the general decay in values and the corruption of the times, or the overpowering force of destiny which led even the greatest men and women towards inevitable defeat. The plays provided a clear statement of the feeling that an age of near-perfection had passed, and that men had nothing to look forward to but increased discord.

The similarities Potter identifies are related to the idea of the helplessness of the tragic hero against stronger forces, and his suffering. This echoes Aristotle's thoughts regarding tragedy, as well as anticipating those of Miller. There is a powerful sense in Death of a Salesman of misery, struggling and defeat, in the light of the power of the American Dream and materialism. Milton's Samson Agonistes (1671) also turns back to Aristotle, but in a more obvious way. Milton stresses the notion of catharsis and of tragedy being a formal presentation of action.

Diverting again to non-English countries in order to achieve a more widespread perception of the rise of tragic drama, we can discern that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, German authors gave us "major tragic drama again" (Leech: 21). It is interesting that the new attitude, of a tragic sense of life, was only introduced by Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in the nineteenth century.

Leech (22) argues that "the change in philosophical approach" of these plays reflect the change in understanding or perceptions of life. He illuminates this:

It implies that our situation is necessarily tragic, that all men exist in an evil situation and, if they are aware, are anguished because they are aware. Hegel emphasises a necessary opposition of forces dividing man from man and man from himself, Kierkegaard a desperate need for man to break out from an imposed pattern.

Leech, hereby, indicates that the views of life of the author and the values of the society in which he lives, influence the literature he writes, and are evident in the literature. Greer (421) details how the different notions in society form the concepts of an author and are reflected in the literature. Greer specifically scrutinises Hegel. He speaks of Hegel's thought as being "a blend of many elements that had previously been regarded as contradictory. It assigned value... to science, reason, and individual freedom - and... to faith, intuition and authority" (Greer: 422). Seventeenth to eighteenth century society embraced a conglomeration of thought: Victorian, or uncompromising reason, as well as Romantic thought, or belief in individuality and intuition. Hegel is thus a good example of someone whose thoughts were formed within his society.

Ibsen from Norway and Strindberg from Sweden wrote notable tragic dramas in the late nineteenth century. Henrik Ibsen is notable because he addressed himself directly to the problems of his day. His plays reflect his views of the problems of his particular society. His earlier plays, Pillars of Society (1877) and An Enemy of the People, examine the corruption of moral values, a real problem in Norway then, as he saw it. "He is today recognised as one of the prime moulders of modern dramatic form and technique" (Greer: 473) and the era of modern drama is generally taken from the time of his plays to the present.

The modern period poses problems regarding the genre of dramas and thus tragedy. Dramas do not all fit easily into clearly defined types. A modern form of drama is tragicomedy, for example, which seems to merge aspects of tragedy and comedy within the same drama. Gassner (Gomez: 47) makes a sweeping statement about modern drama:

[It] often consists of an analysis or challenge carried to a consistent conclusion. It offers no happy endings as a salve for suffering characters or as an evasion of an issue; nor does it substitute sentimentality for stern confrontations of reality. Yet, whether it concludes in victory or disaster for the protagonist, this type of drama falls between the provinces of comedy and tragedy.

There are such modern dramas, which we can classify as tragicomedies, such as Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Literature is mutable. It can alter its form and content to reflect the transformations of a dynamic society. Yet there are also modern dramas, which can be classified as tragedies, such as Miller's Death of a Salesman, as will be investigated in Chapter 4, Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman": a tragic hero or an anti-hero?

It has become evident through this scrutiny of the history of the concept of tragedy, that the meaning of the word "tragedy" and the form, content and principles inherent in tragic dramas, are reflections of the author's perception of life in his time and his society. Literature (and thus tragic drama) is subject to the prevailing thoughts, theories and discoveries of each era.

Dixon (48) aptly states: "And time moved on, and with time came change... and with it came the need for a new setting, a new expression for thoughts suited to an age no longer epic." We have arrived at a time where we need to accept the new setting for

and new expression of tragic drama. Modern consciousness has gone through such a transformation that the descriptive concepts of Aristotle's are no longer completely relevant to modern thought and definitions of tragedy.

1.3 A definition of tragedy

There are certain links, common ground, underlying the various definitions of tragic drama that have persisted throughout the eras. The essential qualities of tragedy that have survived through all ages are: dignity and seriousness of content and in the presentation of the hero, the significance of the tragic hero (character and tragic flaw) and the suffering of the hero within a basic moral force which impacts on the audience.

1.3.1 Dignity and seriousness of content and in the presentation of the hero

Firstly, tragedy necessitates a serious theme or content for the drama. Dixon's interpretation of this involves a serious way of thinking about and viewing the world; "tragedy is preoccupied with the more serious, enigmatic or afflicting circumstances of life" (Dixon: 11). John of Garland, from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, talks about "shameful and wicked deeds" (Leech: 2). Potter (128), in identifying the links among the plays of Shakespeare, Chapman and Middleton, finds the "powerful sense of the misery and misfortune of human life" as the most striking similarity. Elder

Olson, in Tragedy and the Theory of Drama, correspondingly postulates that tragedy “shows an individual living a life without meaning... it portrays the disintegration of contemporary civilisation... in the eyes of the author or of his hero, reality is a chaos instead of a cosmos (Gomez: 57). Miller considers the most important aspect of tragedy to be the questions that arise from the drama: they must “define humanity and the right way to live” (Gomez: 61).

Moreover, the presentation of this serious content should be dignified, with a moral or serious tone. John of Garland defined tragedy as “a poem written in a grand style” (Leech: 2). George Jean Nathan asserts that in presenting the tragedy of the “little men” (the common man, not the great tragic heroes of old), the treatment also calls for a serious and moral tone, as well as a “splendour of prose or poetry” (Gomez: 58). The tragedy need not be written in poetry, as Aristotle suggests, but, like Miller, Elder Olson avers that “the language and style should simply be that which is appropriate to the tragic character - one that manifests his dignity” (Gomez: 58).

1.3.2 The significance of the tragic hero: character and flaw

A common strand in perception of tragedy is that the tragic hero should be a representative character, not necessarily of status and virtue, but depicting fundamental aspects of human nature, so that the audience can identify with him and his suffering, and thereby learn from it. His character, being human, allows for a flaw, or faulty view of the world, so that he suffers and dies.

Although the tragic hero represented mankind in the traditional tragic dramas, and his suffering showed justice, from which all of humanity could learn, the modern tragic hero's suffering seems to be a single, separate phenomenon, which doesn't affect humanity (Gomez: 59). Yet for Dorothea Krook, representativeness is more important than social status (Draper: 19). He should represent "some fundamental, persistent aspect of man's nature" (Draper: 20). Aristotle proposes that the hero possess grandeur in both status and character, so that his suffering is far-reaching and affects the audience (Gomez: 60), but both Miller (Gomez: 61) and Joseph Conrad (Leech: 46) contend that rank is unimportant and that the hero should be "one of us". More important to these writers, is the message in the drama. This coincides with Aristotle's Poetics; he describes tragedy as "an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life.... Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse... if you string together a set of speeches expressive of character... you will not produce the essential tragic effect..." (Draper: 41). Character comes second to action and thus content. Character, Aristotle continues, reveals "moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids" (Draper: 41). Choice is an aspect of tragedy that Miller deems vital. The hero must have the capacity to choose between alternatives that are sufficiently serious to have changed the course of his life (Jackson 1963: 75).

Because the hero represents humanity, he naturally has a flaw - he represents reality (the fundamental aspects of man) in the general sense. This flaw can be in a matter of judgement, a poor decision, or having a defective view concerning the world. This flaw is not necessarily limited to those of higher status, but is inherent in the common man. He is not "pre-eminently virtuous or just", according to Aristotle (Leech: 1).

1.3.3 Suffering of the hero within a basic moral force, and the impact on the audience

Tragedy also presents suffering of the hero, as a result of his flaw or faulty judgement. This suffering happens within the context of a greater structure, cosmos, or moral forces. These forces constitute the ideology in which man believes, whether it be materialism, Christianity or fate. The hero struggles within, against and to try to make sense of this cosmos, only to be defeated. The defeat seems meaningless, yet allows the audience to question life, forces of life, action, and the meaning of suffering. This might result in a catharsis of pity and terror, or simply in the questioning of one's own humanity.

Dixon (11) considers the agonising experience to result from faulty reasoning and thinking about the world. For John of Garland (Leech: 2), tragedy simply ends in grief. Potter's study of Shakespeare's dramas sees suffering as the "pain of struggling against forces too great for even the tragic hero to overcome" (Potter: 128). Reality is seen as a "chaos instead of a cosmos" for Elder Olson (Gomez: 57). Implicit in this struggle, is the idea of a structure within which and against which the hero fights. The fight and questioning and seemingly unjust consequences of his action or views, cause the hero to see reality as chaotic and meaningless. Potter (128) reveals that the tragic heroes in Jacobean dramas struggle against forces such as decay in values and corruption or the forces of destiny. Justice and reason seem limited and the forces, which lead to the inevitable defeat of the tragic hero, can be

neither fully understood nor rationalised (Steiner: 8). Perhaps this is one of the causes of the fear that the audience experiences.

The classical idea of fear is that it originates from the idea that we might also be overcome by misfortune, as the tragic hero is (Gomez: 59). This has developed into the modern idea, espoused by Miller, that the fear is of being uncertain of who we are, “the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world” (Gomez: 59).

No matter whether tragedy is classical or modern, there is always a response from the audience. I.A. Richards, following Aristotle, asserts in Principles of Literary Criticism that the ideal tragic effect should be “a balance and reconciliation of pity and terror” (Draper: 23). Geoffrey Brereton supplements the importance I.A. Richards places on the emotional response of the audience when he states that “the significance of a work of art is dependent on the emotions which it generates” (Draper: 23). Whatever the emotion that is evoked in the audience, the ultimate effect of a tragic drama should be, as Leech (54) declares, to “sharpen our feeling of responsibility, to make us more fully aware that we have erred as the tragic figures have erred.”

1.3.4 Definition of tragedy

A definition of tragic drama that incorporates the common essential features throughout tragic dramatic history would thus be:

Tragedy necessitates a serious theme and content, presented in a dignified manner with a moral or serious tone, written in prose or poetry as long as the language and style manifests the dignity of the hero. The tragic hero should be a representative character, not necessarily of status and virtue, but depicting fundamental aspects of human nature, so that the audience can identify with him and his suffering, and thereby learn from it. His character, being human, allows for a flaw, or faulty view and judgement of the world, which results in the protagonist's suffering and death. This suffering happens within the context of a greater structure, cosmos, or system of moral forces, which constitutes the ideology in which man believes, whether it be materialism, Christianity or fate. The hero struggles within, against and to try to make sense of this cosmos, only to be defeated. The defeat seems meaningless, yet allows the audience to question life, forces of life, action, and the meaning of suffering. This might result in catharsis of pity and terror in the audience, or simply in the questioning of one's own humanity.

1.4 The impact of a changing society on the artist, particularly the tragic playwright, and his works

The influence of the developments in society on literature and thus on the concept of tragedy has been discussed in the previous section. One needs to examine, however, the importance of the playwright and how a changing society affects his context. It thus affects his work, the tragic drama, since the concept of the tragic hero is involved with the values of the society within which he functions and from which he is perceived and judged. Particular attention will be given to the modern era and how modern society and concepts, such as realism, expressionism and modernism, have affected the works of modern playwrights. What can be considered to be the three defining aspects of tragedy through all the eras and how they have been affected as a result of the authors' modern context, will be addressed.

1.4.1 The contextual influence on the author's work: a Marxist perspective

The basis of my argument lies in the Marxist idea that the context of the author influences his literary work. Not all literary theories agree with this assumption. Ironically, literary theories are affected by society and new theories are developed according to society's current concerns. If literary theories are affected by society, then surely literature is, too. Some theories, such as New Criticism and Russian Formalism exclude the author's biography completely, emphasising the importance of an autonomous text. For example, the Russian Formalist view of literature as an expression of the author's perception and personality is rejected; the author is downgraded "in order to guarantee the independence of literary studies, and to save them from being merely a second-rate form of history or psychology" (Jefferson *et al*: 8). Marxism, instead, sees literature in the context of the author, who is again assessed within the structure of his political, social and economic world.

Marxism is not alone in emphasising the importance of the author. In 1863 a French scholar, Hippolyte Taine, published his views on Positivism:

A literary text... must be regarded as the expression of the psychology of an individual, which in its turn is the expression of the milieu and the period in which the individual lived, and of the race to which he belonged. All human achievement can be explained by reference to these causes (Jefferson *et al*: 3).

Positivism, like Marxism, thus regards an author's mind-set, race and time as influencing the literary text. If art is an expression of a person's perception of reality (mimesis), and is influenced by the person's life experiences, then art is necessarily influenced by the history, the social lifestyle, the political structure and the economic circumstances of the period in which the artist lives. This reality represented in art

can be a social reality, a psychological one, or an experimental reality (Jefferson *et al.*: 10), depending on the interests of the author.

1.4.2 The ideological influences on the modern playwright and his works

The modern playwright (modern drama generally being dated from approximately 1880, the time of Ibsen's plays) is exposed to numerous influences on modern society, such as nationalism, revolutions and world wars. One of the influential forces that emerged from political change, is Liberalism, which has been seen to be a dominant force in the early part of the twentieth century. Liberalism, which is characterised by sentiments of tolerance, understanding and progressiveness, was expressed in the suffragette movement, a movement which empowered women, undermined the power of men and encouraged women to stand up for their rights. There was also an escalation of the numbers of people adhering to the principles of liberalism, Ford (20) suggests, at the end of the First World War (1914-1918). Liberalism was a reaction against authority - it was the people in authority who caused the war - hence the liberal twenties (Ford: 20), so accurately portrayed in Fitzgerald's well-known novel, The Great Gatsby.

Since Liberalism challenged authority, it follows that it encouraged a desire to challenge traditional approaches. This is very similar to Modernism, which experimented with different forms of art. "Modernist literary texts... [were] experimental, enigmatic and richly ambiguous" (Eagleton 1983: 139). Liberalism and Modernism in turn affected the playwright, as it inspired him to experiment with

different forms and techniques of drama. An example of this liberalism can be seen in the "little theatre" movement of the 1920's. This movement was begun in order to raise drama above a purely commercial level. Performances were staged of plays by unknown writers and this encouraged further experimentation, such as with content and structures of plays (Gomez: 54), so, for example, although modern plays do have acts and scenes, they are not necessarily divided into the usual five-acts. Death of a Salesman is an example of a modern play that has only two acts.

Increasing knowledge and advances in anthropology, psychology, technology and the sciences also served to promote liberalism and modernism, and to undermine absolute values in authority, religion and ethics (Ford: 22, 24). Greer (552) maintains that both scientists and non-scientists were affected by scientific discovery, as established ideas and knowledge were challenged. "The common thread in the new scientific ideas is that the universe is not as knowable or as orderly as had been previously thought" (Greer 552). There was no longer a firm or solid belief in which to feel secure, so people began looking for something new to adhere to and in which to believe.

Realism is another force that impacted on the modern playwright and thus his dramatic works. This literary movement started in France in the 1830s with the novelist, Honore de Balzac, who portrayed human strengths and weaknesses in his novels. Charles Dickens from England, and Henrik Ibsen from Norway, were also concerned with human problems, hardships and themes. Dickens, for example, showed the horror of the workplace and the debtors' prisons (Greer 472). Realism thus resulted from an increase in scientific knowledge and social interest, and "eclipse[d] romanticism in European literature" (Greer: 473). A realist does not see

the world as an idealistic place full of hope and goodness; a realist considers the universe and man to be mechanisms, as the scientist sees his work objectively and detaches himself from it. C. Hugh Holman clarifies realism in terms of Marxism:

man's personality is seen as an

...inevitable product of the forces of heredity and environment; his physique, a psychophysical organism; and his conduct, not the product of character and free will, but of chemical and physical processes over which he has no control (Gomez: 48).

Man is seen in purely scientific terms, with no control over his behaviour or character.

This appears excessively deterministic, surely a human is an individual with a mind and a will and the ability to accept responsibility for his actions?

1.4.3 Dramatic realism and expressionism in modern dramas

Dramatic realism refers to the attempt to represent life as realistically as possible in dramas (rather than to represent a Platonic ideal), so Aristotle's description for realism would have probably been mimesis in the general sense. In England, realism in drama was first perceived in domestic tragedies of the sixteenth century, such as the Yorkshire Tragedy. In the nineteenth century, this form was reintroduced, most notably through the works of Ibsen. It is a significant form as the subject matter is the life of the common person, and modern dramas, such as Death of a Salesman copy this pattern (Gomez: 48). Also, Gomez (49) demonstrates, modern social dramas show the impact of an increasingly widely-held view, advocated by men such as Alexandre Dumas *films*, that a play should serve a social purpose and relate to social questions. Miller's play, A View from the Bridge is an example of such a social play

as it probes the “psychological and social forces that lead inevitably to Eddie Carbone’s destruction” (Biggsby 1997: 13).

The effects of realism on the tragic playwright and thus on tragic drama are extensive: prose as opposed to poetry is used. Extensive stage directions are employed in order to make the characters more authentic. The hero often has psychological complexities, and character becomes more important than plot. Since heredity determines character, the responsibility of the hero for his actions diminishes. The hero is often also a collective character, or a crowd, because of the emphasis on society. Lastly, the common man is used as the tragic protagonist (Gomez: 50). These features differ markedly from those of traditional dramatic tragedies, yet they are in line with the thoughts and views of the artists in modern times.

Realism gives way to symbolism and expressionism. Instead of literature representing actual reality, symbolism and expressionism see literature as only representing “inner significances”. These are represented by symbols created in the mind of the author or characters. Playwrights thus give generic names such as “Father” or “Son” to their characters, to depersonalise characters and make them representative of people generally. An expressionist writer, August Strindberg (Gomez: 53), explains this philosophy:

Any thing may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On an insignificant background of reality, imagination designs and embroiders novel patterns; a medley of memories, experiences, free fantasies and improvisations.

Expressionism is intensely subjective as each person can understand different levels in the drama, or can interpret the drama in the context of his own frame of reference

and personal beliefs. Subjectivity, which proposes that each human is unique and that life can only be understood through one's internal experiences, is an element characterising literature after World War 1. Greer (570) calls this "Contemporary Literature" and characterises the tendency as moving "away from seeing the individual as an object geared to an orderly and purposeful environment." The individual is unique and thus the playwrights "desired to penetrate more deeply the minds of their characters, to enter in the characters' private thoughts" (Greer: 570). This tendency is evident in Death of a Salesman. Miller penetrates into Loman's mind and shows us his thoughts and memories. The original title for the drama was, pertinently, to have been The Inside of his Head (Welland: 43).

The psychology of the mind of characters is one of the new ways of interpreting people and trying to make sense of a seemingly senseless world. There is, however, "no commonly accepted metaphysical picture of man" (Ford: 23). Is he, as Freud believed, a biological phenomenon who is subject to his instinctive desires, or is he "the outcome of economic and social forces" (Ford: 23) as the Marxists believe, or is he a sinful man whom only God can redeem? This confusion is a far more personal result of the rapid change, which followed the increasing explosion of knowledge and the disintegration of a unified perception of the world. Each person and each playwright is left to decide on his own philosophy.

1.4.4 The Death of Tragedy?

This question of how society and playwrights view man and his relationship (or lack thereof) with a higher being or force, is integral to the modern concept of the "death of tragedy". Many critics have expressed concern about the "death" of modern tragedy, for example, Dixon (24) makes the valid statement that "modern man regards the drama... as a secular amusement", and that it has completely lost its religious significance. At a time when few playwrights are Christians and when so many different religions are accepted, it seems superfluous to expect dramas to be religious, or to negate their worth just because they are not religious. The playwright may be more concerned with materialism, or social or psychological problems. These aspects, then, and not religion, would be an integral part of his drama. Miller makes his dramas applicable to the audience by writing about basic aspects of humanity. In an interview with Robert A. Martin, he asserts that, "the psychology of man is basically unchanged. It has to be or we wouldn't be able to watch Shakespeare any more with any emotion; we would be simply like archaeologists" (Martin 1970: 36).

Gomez suggests that the death of tragedy is not only due to the indiscriminate use of the word "tragedy" to refer to anything catastrophic, but also results from the "the worship of progress [instead of a God] that followed the advent of industry and technology" (Gomez: 56). He explains further:

This faith in progress made modern man's outlook generally optimistic for seemingly everything is within his reach - even absolute happiness. He is so secured in this little illusion that bleak events such as wars and revolutions - stuffs that tragedy can easily be made of - fail to dampen his spirit" (Gomez: 56).

Tragedy rests on an idea that events or circumstances are beyond one's control. If man believes himself to be in control of all things, and believes that there is no influence from a natural force or God, then it follows that man cannot be deeply affected by tragic events that occur in dramas.

Henry A. Myers's opinion about the death of tragedy coincides with Gomez's: he believes that a society cannot simultaneously hold onto the belief that man is the most superior being and can achieve utopia (as in the American Dream), as well as comprehend tragic wisdom. He adds: "those who are not taken in with this popular illusion unfortunately do not have anything worthwhile to replace it. Hence, [there is] the impossibility of nurturing the tragic spirit" (Gomez: 56). As progress has continued, old values such as spiritualism, idealism and morality have been replaced by different sets of values: materialism, pragmatism and immorality (Gomez: 46). These changes are evident in modern dramas. Willy Loman, in Death of a Salesman, is consumed by materialistic values. A sense of displacement, alienation and insecurity, arising from too-rapid change and world wars, have caused many people to adopt a *laissez-faire* policy leading to moral decadence, and thus a general degeneration of society has ensued (Gomez: 46). These sentiments of alienation and materialism have in turn affected the tragic playwright and been expressed in tragic dramas.

The context of the modern author explains, to a large extent, the themes evident in dramas. There has been an increase in the belief in man in modern society; people, rather than spiritual beings, are now able to bring about social changes in order to solve problems of evil (seen as social in nature, rather than spiritual). Arthur Miller's

theory concerning the lack of the tragic spirit in modern society and literature blames the psychiatric and sociological views of life. He says, "If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is impossible" (Gomez: 56).

Gomez (57) also makes the valid, Marxist, point that heredity and environment, rather than fate and destiny as the Greeks believed, are the constraints behind modern tragedy. A person living a meaningless life, or a civilisation disintegrating, or chaos reigning instead of a cosmos, are modern perceptions of tragedy. This view is expressed in Death of a Salesman.

1.4.5 Unity beneath diversity

Owing to ever-increasing change, progress and technology, society in the Modern Age interprets literature in a variety of new ways. Yet Draper (12) insists that, for tragedy, there is "an underlying unity beneath diversity." As defined earlier, this unity can be seen in three aspects of tragedy: dignity and seriousness of content and in the presentation of the hero, the significance of the tragic hero, and the suffering of the tragic protagonist within a basic moral structure, which impacts on the audience (Gomez: 58). These three aspects are central to determining whether or not a drama can be seen as tragic, yet these aspects have altered considerably in accordance with time and the particular playwright's views of life. Tracing their development reflects how a changing society impacts on the tragic playwright and his works.

1.4.5.1 Serious content and a dignified hero

Firstly, seriousness and dignity in presentation and in character still exists in modern tragedies, even though moral disintegration has led to cynicism about moral elevation. The question of whether or not the employment of prose or poetry in drama affects the dignity and seriousness of the tragedy is often asked, yet tragic dramas written in prose are as effective as ones written in poetry. George Jean Nathan (Gomez: 58) argues that

The fall of kings calls for a splendour of prose or poetry (tragedy traditionally demands a highly moral and serious tone), otherwise it might be quite as unimpressive as the fall of little men. But the tragedy of the little men, to be as impressive as that of a king, calls as well for such treatment.

Tragedies written in prose can thus also be dignified and serious. Anderson (27) takes the opposing, traditional view that "Shakespeare's commoners converse in prose... because their lack of stature does not raise the expectations which accompany the use of verse. So, too, in our democratic world, whose concerns are relatively trivial, verse as a means of communicating commonplaces, is inappropriate." She continues (Anderson: 28): "This does not mean that Miller sees no place for the benefits of poetry in his work. Drama is art and will use whatever means are necessary to achieve its heights."

Aristotle, in his outline of Greek tragic drama, mentions that the speech expressed must be beautiful, or have "pleasurable accessories" (Leech: 1). He seems to exclude dramas written in prose, as prose does not sound as beautiful as poetry. Steiner (1963: 238-239) is also against the idea of a tragedy written in prose. He

acknowledges that prose tragedy is a modern idea, but declares prose tragedies to be paradoxical because verse precedes prose in literature. He argues:

Literature...raises discourse above common speech for purposes of invocation, adornment, or remembrance. The natural means of such elevation are rhythm and explicit prosody. By not being prose, by having metre or rhyme or a pattern of formal recurrence, language imposes on the mind a special occasion and preserves its shape in the memory. It becomes verse. The notion of literary prose is highly sophisticated... It is certain that Greek tragedy was, from the outset, written in verse. It sprang from the archaic rituals of celebration or lament and was inseparable from the use of language in a heightened lyric mode... Greek tragedy is sung, danced, and declaimed. Prose has no place in it (Steiner: 23).

It is important to note that Steiner talks about Greek drama, written in a different society to modern drama. A central reason for Steiner's views is that he considers the heroic characters to be royalty and of a higher status than the common man and this elevation must be reflected in their speech. "Common men are prosaic, and revolutionaries write their manifestos in prose. Kings answer in verse", Steiner (241) explains.

Gomez (58) makes the point that prose drama uses language similar to the ordinary speech of man. Language is used which does not allow for the expression of profound thoughts, and nor should it. It should reflect the entirety of the tragic hero. If the tragic hero is a common man, so should language be common prose. This is not to say that there should not be dignity in the language, but simply that "poetry is not an absolute requirement for the tragic genre... the language and style should simply be that which is appropriate to the tragic character - one that manifests his dignity" (Gomez: 58).

Language and style do reflect the modern tragic hero, but realistically. The effect the realist dramatists intend is to make the tragic hero seem more realistic and thus identifiable: they even use dialect to make the drama seem realistic. There is no room for poetry or verse in the ordinary, everyday speech of the ordinary man. If one says that prose and dialect oppose dignity and seriousness, then one would have to say that no human who speaks in prose has any dignity.

Dignity, or in modern drama, realism, is also reflected in action. This action should be serious and applicable to the audience. In modern dramas, there is a preoccupation with social issues and a determination to enforce the point of the drama, so settings are familiar and realistic, often a factory or street to enable the drama to be performed in different countries and still be effective (Gomez: 62).

The rise of liberalism and realism, an increase in interest in psychology and the sciences, social issues and political changes, have all served to create a certain mind-set in modern artists, particularly tragic playwrights. This mind-set is revealed in the content of the dramas, as well as the realistic presentation of the tragic heroes.

1.4.5.2 The significance of the tragic hero: character and flaw

The tragic protagonist, secondly, has always been central to a tragic drama. There have been changes in the exact nature of the hero, and whom he represents and what his rank is, but his significance has remained unchanged (Gomez: 58).

What are the specific qualities that determine whether or not a character is worthy of being a hero? Aristotle suggests in The Poetics that he be "a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity, but by some error of judgement, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity..." (Leech: 1).

Leech (38) qualifies Aristotle's hero as not being completely good or evil, as the fall of a saint would horrify us and the fall of an evil man would not move us at all. Dixon (130) explains Aristotle further. He feels that the audience instinctively sides with good, so the villain cannot be a hero. "His passage from bad to better fortune... could not evoke either sympathy nor moral satisfaction; while [if] his collapse [were] from high to low estate... compassion would be sought in vain, its place taken by contentment with the justice done." The saint should thus also not be a tragic hero, as his misfortune would be morally wrong.

The common man is not completely good or evil, nor is he "pre-eminently virtuous and just", so he should be a suitable figure for the role of the tragic protagonist.

Aristotle's criteria that the hero have a good reputation and be prosperous have a three-fold purpose. Firstly, he will "appear to have a special claim to our attention, [so] it is a dramatic convenience if the central character is given a position of manifest eminence" (Leech: 35). Secondly, he has something to lose: a reputation or wealth or rank, which will make his suffering seem even worse. Thirdly, he will embody whatever society considers important, such as wealth or rank or virtue, and thereby represent mankind. If the tragic protagonist is central to the plot, then surely that is enough reason for his eminence. Also, every person has something to lose, whether it is wealth or dignity, or the joy of living. It does not necessarily have to be wealth or status. One of the worst types of suffering is psychological, when the psyche is at odds with the world and the soul is unhappy. Lastly, a modern man, such as Willy Loman, can embody what society considers to be important: values of materialism and competitiveness.

A modern belief is thus that the ordinary man, speaking in ordinary prose, is worthy of being a tragic hero. Jean-Francois Marmontel (1723-99) shared this view years ago: "We wrong the human heart, we misread nature, if we believe that it requires titles to rouse and touch us" (Draper: 18). Yet it is only from the nineteenth century that a common man or bourgeois is commonly deemed worthy enough to be a tragic figure. Until then, he was assumed to be a "person of exalted rank" (Draper: 18). There has indeed been a great deal of criticism concerning lower class people assuming the roles of the tragic hero as "their social position deprives their fall of any wider significance, and therefore any element of real catastrophe. And their limited mental range deprives their suffering of any greatness" (Draper: 18). This is an unfair generalisation, assuming that lower class people are mentally inferior. As to the significance of modern dramas, the majority of the so-called lower class are literate

enough to understand modern performances, and if the hero is a common man, he will represent the masses and thus be significant to them.

Joseph Conrad says, in discussing the tragic hero, Lord Jim, in his novel: "[The tragic hero] is one of us. He is not necessarily virtuous, not necessarily free from profound guilt. What he is, is a man who reminds us strongly of our own humanity, who can be accepted as standing for us" (Leech: 46).

Gomez (60) suggests that Aristotle's prescribed hero cannot exist in the modern day as many critics have stated that "kings and nobles have lost their aura of dignity". There is also the view that society no longer believes in the importance and greatness of men. Levin supports this view when he comments that "today's plays deal with littler people and less mighty emotions, not because we have become interested in commonplace souls and their unglamorous adventures, but because we have come... to see the soul of man as commonplace and its emotions as mean" (Gomez: 61).

Miller strongly opposes this idea. He attributes the insistence upon nobility and rank of the tragic protagonist to a desperate adherence to the "outward forms of tragedy" (Gomez: 61). Miller argues in Tragedy and the Common Man:

If rank or nobility of character were indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king...[Rank] is significant only as it reflects the question of the social application of the hero's career. But at the same time, his stature as a hero is not so utterly dependent upon his rank that a grocer cannot

outdistance a president as a tragic figure - providing, of course, that the grocer's career engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationship of man to God - the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground or a fog in which disembodied spirits pass each other in an endless twilight (Weales 1977: 145).

Miller mentions an eminent concern of tragedy - the importance of the issues presented in the drama. Like Aristotle, he places action (or issues) above character in significance. Leech (37-38), on the other hand, feels that there must be something notable about the hero for him to actually be the hero. This eminence can be a special virtue, or seen through "the particularity of the distress" or seen "through the sharpness of the revelation", the "anagnorisis". Regarding Willie Loman in Death of a Salesman, Leech says that he "comes to a desperation, but [does not] seem to know more at the end than at the beginning. [He does not] seem 'notable' in the sense that we need from a tragic figure... he is the victim of the American Dream rather than of the human condition" (Leech: 37-38).

1.4.5.3 Suffering of the hero and its impact on

Nathan compromises these two views. He argues that "we are not without kings, though they may not wear the royal purple, we have men of heart and spirit - and also mind. They are or may be the meat of important tragedy" (Gomez: 60-61).

There have been further developments in the concept of the tragic hero. As in the domestic tragedies of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the common man is the central hero. Sometimes, the central figure is a group, a collective character or a mass hero. This is because modern views include the concept that society and the environment shape man. During the period of Industrialisation, a new type of hero,

the capitalists who rose from the working class, became popular in drama (Gomez: 50). Societal changes do affect authors and these changes are reflected in literature.

The tragic hero has in essence remained the same: changes have occurred in terms of which specific moral qualities and what rank the hero should possess, but this is not the only concern of tragedy. "The philosophy of tragedy usually involves coming to terms with death. This may entail the question of personal justification for the death", Gurr (1988: 49) proposes. Is the hero responsible for his actions, or is his death due to fate? Tragedy should promote a growing awareness and understanding of life, through understanding the meaning of death.

1.4.5.3 Suffering of the hero and its impact on the audience

Death and suffering is the third aspect of tragedy that has survived time. Draper (12) believes that central to this continuity "is the preoccupation with suffering, the experience from which tragedy springs and to which it seeks to give a meaningful context... The effect of a tragedy may well be to underline the inexplicability of suffering, to ask the question to which no answer is expected: Why?". Draper furthers his argument by saying that suffering gives people a sense of context and knowledge of what it means to be human. Perhaps, with the disjointedness and alienation of society, more tragedies should be produced.

Gomez (59) details the portrayal of suffering in modern drama as a "single, separate phenomenon"; the hero is no longer representative of mankind. Anderson (26), in her comments on suffering in Death of a Salesman, supports this aspect as a characteristic of modern drama: "Death of a Salesman is not a traditional tragedy. We cannot expect any widespread tragedy to follow his death. No one knows. No one cares." Yet again, Ferguson (84) argues that "The struggle [or suffering] is internal, within the divided consciousness of the tragic protagonist." It cannot thus have widespread disastrous results. One must bear certain considerations in mind when examining suffering: tragedy is a demonstration of the universal moral law: man gets what he pays for and pays for what he gets. The actual suffering experience, the context of suffering and the religious or secular interpretation of the meaning of suffering have changed with time, but suffering has not. Yet, surely, if this isolated suffering becomes common enough, it becomes, in its own way, representative of the isolated nature of suffering in modern society.

Suffering, disaster and ultimately death come to the tragic hero through an error in behaviour, thought or perception. Aristotle calls it "hamartia" and believes it to be an error in judgement (Leech: 38); Dixon (130) calls it a fault or frailty of the hero which leads to his downfall. Ruin is thus self-inflicted. The hero's own actions cause his ruin. Yet the specific error, Dixon (133) states, has not been pin-pointed. "Whether it means a moral or intellectual error, of the heart or head, no-one has yet discovered; an error rising out of a momentary or permanent state of mind or character, an error to which responsibility attaches or does not attach itself, an error which could or could

not have been avoided, whose results could or could not have been foreseen, an error of ignorance or passion or miscalculation" has not been determined.

Miller has his own interpretation of the tragic flaw. He maintains that it is the hero's "inherent willingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status" (Gomez: 62).

In denouncing modern tragedy, Dixon (37) says that all tragedies end in defeat. Circumstances overpower the hero, but his error or frailty is his alone. It is some "error or folly or disease in one not shared by all" (Dixon: 37). This implies that another person who was stronger, better or wiser than the hero might have overcome the problem and emerged victorious. Modern tragedy thus presents the world as understandable. Yet Dixon believes that this is not true tragedy, because tragedy must not allow reasoning and comprehension. Destiny and the unknown are not to be reasoned out (Dixon: 35-37). Tragedy "must not expose the moral world to criticism" (Dixon: 130). Steiner (8) also believes that "where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but not tragedy".

Gomez (51) supports these interpretations of tragedy, but adds that in many modern tragedies the hero is not considered to be responsible for his actions. This results from a belief that hereditary traits and instincts govern man. Moral judgements are therefore treated rather indifferently and taboo subjects are being presented on stage. Suffering resulting from a man's error can be blamed on heredity. The

meaning of suffering is lost. Suffering, in traditional tragedies, is ensured by the hero's decision, as Brooks (1960: 4-5) indicates.

He finally wills to accept it as properly pertaining to the nature of things, including his own deepest nature... The acceptance is not a weary submission: the tragic hero is possessed of tremendous vitality... Nor is the acceptance necessarily a joyful submission to what the hero recognises to be the just order of things: few tragic heroes are saints... the acceptance springs from a desire for knowledge, for the deepest kind of self-knowledge, knowledge of the full meaning of one's ultimate commitments.

Aristotle mentions that suffering is brought about by the reversal of a situation. The action or situation makes an about-turn (Draper: 45). Aristotle calls it "peripeteia". It is "a change of fortune basic in tragedy...a sudden change is likely to have a greater impact" (Leech: 63).

This "peripeteia" leads to suffering and "agnorisis", sometimes simultaneously. Tragedy is about suffering. "The suffering presented in tragedy is an image of something we intellectually know is in store for ourselves but cannot in imagination properly anticipate" (Leech: 67). Suffering leads to "agnorisis", or discovery. It is when the hero changes from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge. Agnorisis "is the agency through which suffering, in the ultimate, mental sense, is brought into full being" (Leech: 67). Draper (1980: 45) explains this agnorisis as "producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune".

Leech (61) mentions that Aristotle does not claim peripeteia or agnorisis to be essential to tragedy. There must be a decline in fortune, but it is not necessarily sudden, as peripeteia is. A decline in fortune, a suffering and an awareness of the

moral order in the universe breaks the tragic protagonist. It cannot be understood. It cannot be repaired. There can be no compensation for the suffering. "Tragic drama tells us that the spheres of reason, order, and justice are terribly limited and that no progress in our science or technical resources will enlarge their relevance" (Steiner: 8).

The elements of most modern tragedy have thus changed significantly, as each playwright has adapted these elements to his own context. There are, nevertheless, some plays that adhere to the traditional concept of tragedy. One has to question why these changes have occurred. Society has changed and literature reflects the important interests and problems of each society. Individuals are also different. Each playwright is limited to his time. He cannot change his frame of reference. His particular upbringing and society have formed his concepts of reality. Had Arthur Miller lived in the sixth century, he would have produced works very different to his present works. These considerations about how a changing society has impacted on the playwright and influenced his works, particularly regarding the concept of the tragic dramatic hero, demonstrate that the concept of the hero is indeed involved with the values of the society within which he functions and from which he is perceived and judged.

1.5 The impact of a changing society on the critic and audience

Each era produces new literature, concerned with different problems and portraying different perceptions of life, in order to mean something to the audience/ readers. Each new work of literature forces the critic to analyse it in the context of the existing canon, and possibly to add to or alter existing concepts concerning that type of literature. "Each new work in any recognisable Kind modifies to some degree our conception of that Kind", Leech (25) comments. The same is true of the concept of tragedy. It is important for the audience and critic to remember how his own context influences his value judgements of literature.

1.5.1 The change in the critic and audience

In discussing Shakespeare's plays, Gurr (1988: 1), makes the important point that although "the texts of the plays themselves do not change much... the readers of the texts do, and so the readings have to be constantly modified by the different kinds of preoccupations each new generation of readers brings to them." In reading or watching a Shakespeare play, modern man interprets themes and reacts differently to aspects of the play, from the audience of the seventeenth century. To name one example, superstitions which the Elizabethan audience believed and feared, are no longer an issue in the twentieth century. We have changed. Our society is different, and although Shakespeare's dramas are still widely read because they encompass

universal and timeless themes of human emotions, our context does affect our comprehension of the dramas.

Comprehending dramas goes hand in hand with analysing them. Over the years, readers, scholars and critics have encountered problems in their practical analyses of literary texts. Responses to these problems have led to the creation of literary theories. A "literary theory provides not only a means of dealing with differences of critical opinion, but also the basis for constructing a more rational, adequate and self-aware discipline of literary studies", Jefferson et al. (7) explains. As there are a variety of ways to view man and the world, as illuminated in the previous section, so there are a variety of ways for the critic to analyse a literary work, on the basis of these metaphysical pictures of man. Each person needs to determine to which philosophy of the world and which corresponding literary theory he adheres. This obviously has implications on which literary works the critics and audience choose to include in the canon.

1.5.2 The changing canon

Jefferson et al. (4) highlights the diversity and variability of the canon. The canon consists of literary works which have been considered by institutions and convention to be of literary value, but the canon is undergoing changes as a result of opposing ideas as to what determines a literary and a non-literary text, and how one measures

literary value. Most literary theories subscribe to the “special values” of literature, which makes a more rational analysis of works of literature possible.

What is the importance of the reader and audience in analysing dramas? What role does the literary approach ascribe to the reader? The reader has been neglected in many theories, sometimes specifically excluded in order to ensure an objective analysis of the text. In more recent theories, though, the subjective response of the reader and critic is regarded as important, but it should be understood within the context of that reader or critic's time (Jefferson et al: 9).

1.5.3 The relationship between the text and response of the critic and audience, according to some literary theories

The Formalists, in their literary studies, separate life and art. The non-literary has no place in the study of literature. Formalism tries to create literature as "an independent science... which studies specifically literary material" (Jefferson et al: 18). Subjective responses of the audience are excluded, as they are not scientific (Jefferson et al: 9). The gap in this theory, is that, in ignoring the response of the audience or reader, the whole point of writing and creating is consequently ignored. An author writes in order to express his views of society, and his reality, and thus to make people think about these views. How can a drama be performed in front of an

audience and not affect the audience in some way, be it positive or negative? A novel will not be bought and read and a drama will not be watched if the response of the audience is not a factor in the writing of the literary work.

Current Marxist criticism, as opposed to Russian Formalism, sees the historicity of literature as "a system of normative values with a complex relation to class power" (Coyle et al: 718). Literature is seen as being an expression of an author's class (and background), written for a specific class. The response of the reader is thus vital in the writing and performance of the drama. The concept of the value of literature, in Marxism, has developed from "a conformity to a set of unchanging aesthetic attributes... [to a] function of the uses of texts" (Coyle et al: 718). Literary texts now have a purpose; certain effects on the audience are desired. Literature does not just consist of artistic language and a pleasing plot.

Another opinion pertaining to how a reader's context affects his interpretation of a literary work, is New Criticism. Leavis maintains that a critic's aim is to experience the text fully, then explain that experience eloquently to the readers. His explanation should be concrete, particular and comparative, not general and abstract (Jefferson et al: 5-6). The experience a critic has is affected by his circumstances and past incidents. It is intensely personal and subjective. The content of the text is merely what is said and the way in which it is said (Jefferson et al: 8); the context and purpose of the author are not contemplated. Yet as an advocate of practical criticism, I.A. Richards warns against bringing irrelevant personal experience to bear on the interpretation of a poem (Richards 1973: 15).

The Pluralist or Liberal Humanist approach to literature, developed after Leavis's New Criticism. It became during the twentieth century "the traditional academic approach to literature" (Peck and Coyle 1986: 154). Generally, in this approach to texts, the critics focus on the texts, but then "move fairly swiftly from the discussion of the text to an impression of the view of life it expresses". What the text says (content) and how it says it (form) is of central importance. Biography and history are combined "with a close discussion of the text in order to move towards an appreciation of what sort of complex statement it is making. Peck & Coyle (154) assert:

It is an approach that seems to look at the text with an open mind and without any apparent commitment to any particular ideological position.

This idea of neutrality has, however, been seriously challenged by contemporary theorists.

The fact that literary theories change and develop and give way to new theories as the critics' societies and frames of reference change, show that the interpretation of literature is linked to changes in context of the author, critic and audience. A changing society thus impacts on the response of the audience and critic. Different needs and wants of the audience, resulting from an era of new interests necessarily means a different response from the audience is evoked. Within the audience, are individuals, who each react to the drama in a different way, depending on his or her intellectual philosophies and background.