


Touches of Greek Tragedy in A View from the Bridge.

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لمسات من المأساة اليونانية في منظر من الجسر

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Abstract:

This paper is mainly concerned with the profound Greek touches in A View from the Bridge by Arthur Miller that is considered as a modern tragedy. It aims at finding out whether it shares certain Greek touches like values, conflict, catharsis, hamartia and suffering. Ancient playwrights, like modern playwrights take on their shoulders the task of portraying man's state in the world where nothing is certain; a world that is disturbed by the terrifying effects of war and technology. Man is now the victim of the rapid progress, the new civilization, the social classes, unemployment and pollution. Hence, a number of modern dramatists present a modern man as a helpless creature, looking for a shelter in the corners of a destructed society.

المخلص:

يتناول هذا البحث بشكل رئيسي اللمسات اليونانية العميقة في رواية "منظر من الجسر" لأرثر ميلر والتي تعتبر مأساة حديثة. ويهدف إلى معرفة ما إذا كان يشترك في بعض اللمسات اليونانية مثل القيم والصراع والتنقيس والعيب والمعاناة. الكتاب المسرحيون القدماء، مثل الكتاب المسرحيين المعاصرين، يأخذون على أكتافهم مهمة تصوير حالة الإنسان في العالم حيث لا يوجد شيء مؤكد؛ عالم منزعج من الآثار المرعبة للحرب والتكنولوجيا. أصبح الإنسان الآن ضحية التقدم السريع والحضارة الجديدة والطبقات الاجتماعية والبطالة والتلوث. ومن هنا يقدم عدد من المسرحيين المعاصرين الإنسان المعاصر كمخلوق عاجز يبحث عن مأوى في زوايا المجتمع المدمر.

Introduction

A handbook of literature defines tragedy as an attempt to demonstrate the "tragic sense of life":

The sense that human beings are inevitably doomed, through their own failures or errors or even the ironic action of their virtues, or through the nature of fate, destiny, or the human condition to suffer, fail and die.... the tragic impulse celebrates courage and dignity in the face of defeat and attempts to portray the grandeur of the human spirit (521-522).

It is quite difficult to introduce a comprehensive definition of tragedy. Silk points out that "for Aristotle in the *Poetics*, tragedy is an entity that has shown variations over the course of time, and an entity whose specimens present marked variations, even in their "developed" form. But nevertheless, an entity whose specimens pose no problem of identification" (6).

In the twentieth century, critics such as C. S. Lewis and Ulrich Simon assert that to be called tragedy a story should be "more than a mere victimage; it must involve a courageous resistance to one's fate" (Eagleton, 15). These critics claim that a fall or reversal of fortune does not make an event a tragedy, the reaction of the protagonist to the event is what differentiates between tragedy and pathos.

Eagleton summarizes the most important aspects of tragedy:

The traditionalist conception of tragedy turns on a number of distinctions-between fate and chance, free will and destiny, inner flaw and outer circumstances, the noble and the ignoble, blindness and insight, historical and universal, the alterable and inevitable, the truly tragic and the mere piteous, heroic defiance and ignominious inertia- which for the most part no longer have force for us (Eagleton, 21-22).

the long quote does not assert a magic formula for a tragedy or a simple definition of it. In contrast, it provides a range of threads that are existent in the so-called tragic plays. This suggests that any play written in any time period which concerns itself with a number of the mentioned aspects might qualify as a candidate for being a tragic play.

The roots of tragedy lie in the ancient Greek religious festivals for the Dionysius in the 5th. Century. Playwrights competed in those festivals with three tragedies and a satyr play. As Greek tragedies were not public entertainment but rituals, they had a "rigid pattern" (Valency, 4). This pattern was thoroughly studies by Aristotle, whose Poetics is the primary source for all who deal with tragedy, whether Greek or modern. Aristotle analyzed the elements of Greek tragedy in great detail, and defined tragedy as:

Tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; .. ; in the form of action,

not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper
purgation of these emotions (Lesky, 5).

According to Aristotle, the most important element is the plot, which is the incidents of the play, as (character gives men qualities, but it is their actions which they do- that brings them happiness or misery) (Valency, 56). He asserted that the events in the play should happen unexpectedly but at the same time consequently, so that there was an element of surprise as well as realism. The most important aspects of a plot are conflict, peripeteia (reversal) anagnorisis (recognition) (Valency, 72). The tragic hero faces a conflict, because of the way he deals with this conflict his fortune is reversed and through this he comes to a recognition of his predicament.

The question why such an eminent person faces a tragic event may arise. Frye partly replies to this question when he writes "the tragedy that happens to the hero does not depend on his moral status. If it is casually related to something he has done, as it is generally is, the tragedy is in the inevitability of the consequences of the act, not in its moral significance as an act" (38). The act that usually causes the dire consequences, which is the hero's "fall", is called "hamartia". Thus, through hamartia the tragic hero is faced with a tragic fall. Being a tragic hero, the protagonist of Greek tragedy faces his fall with such dignity that he inspires the audience elated feelings despite the pessimism of the play. Greek

tragedies assert that "life holds no promise of security or stability, but man should live and die in dignity" (Valency, 7).

On the other hand, what is meant by Modern tragedy is whether modern plays can be related to the Greek tragedies of the classical period. As Orr points out:

Part of continuity is provided by formal aesthetic rules attributed to Aristotle, which demand a tragic hero with a distinctive weakness causing a reversal of personal fortune, a unity of time, place and action, a tragic action purging the emotions of the audience, and a realization by the fallen hero of the true horror of his fate.(xi)

Although modern tragedies were written for very different cultures, they have certain common traits with Greek tragedies. The main similarity is that a tragic hero is needed for such a play. A brief definition of a tragic character as offered by McCollom includes a person superior to most people but who is destroyed through hubris, hamartia or a rigid belief in what he holds to be right for him (2). The tragic hero needs to be courageous enough to stand against forces against his beliefs. Mason suggests that "tragedy requires heroes to assert their defiance of adverse circumstances, and in the process express their feelings of processing and 'I' which confronts the universe" (26).

Another continuous tread is the aim of tragedy. While for Aristotle it aims to get the audience rid of certain emotions such

as terror and pity and arouse them spiritually by the courage of the hero, O'Neill describes his motives in writing tragedies as follows: "what I am after is to get an audience leaving the theatre with an exultant feeling from seeing somebody on the stage facing life, fighting against the eternal odds" (Williams, 116). According to O'Neill, the struggle of mankind against conflicts to shape his own life is enough to make him a tragic hero, even if he is unsuccessful in the end (Williams, 116).

A part from these Aristotelian elements, modern tragedy differs from the Greek tragedy in two main aspects, one of which is the protagonist's social status, and the second is the emphasis on the characterization and the psychological features of the characters.

Modern tragedy also differs from its Greek counterparts in that more importance is given to characterization while the characters in Greek tragedy tend to be flat. "In the type of plot characteristic of modern drama, the manipulation of a reversal through a discovery With its emphasis on character, recognitions are more often psychological than revelations of kinship" (Valency, 74). The characters of modern tragedy have more psychological depth as well as more psychological conflicts within, thus the discoveries they made tend to be inner one's physical facts of their lives. One more point to be considered is the fact that Greek tragedies have a divine mode, where many events seem to be precipitated by the Gods and Goddesses whereas the modern

tragedies tend to deal with social aspects as well as dealing with psychological aspects of the characters (Orr, xii).

Eagleton claims that tragedy is universal, and that "all tragedies are specific: there are tragedies of particular peoples and genders, of nations and social groups ... not to speak of those hole-in-the corner calamities of obscure individual lives." According to him those ordinary and insignificant people have nothing in common "other than the fact of suffering. But suffering is a mightily powerful language to share in common" (xvi).

Discussion

Tragedy claims to be universal and relating to whole mankind. In Miller's play the social context has a more important impact on determining the events that led up to the tragedy. The situation of Eddie as an Italian immigrant living in the Italian ghetto makes the play quite circumstantial rather than universal. However, the conflict arising from Eddie Carbone's values and the way he deals with them give the play a universal dimension.

Eddie has severe inner conflicts. On the one hand Eddie is sexually attracted to his niece, on the other hand his strict conception of social taboos prevent him from admitting his incestuous desires even to himself. When his wife, Beatrice, tries to talk to him about his problem, he reacts strongly to it. " I can't talk about it" (V F T B, 36). Such a desire is a violation of of a taboo in any civilized social order and is totally against Eddie's

principles as a family man, so he tries hard to repress this feeling. This creates a discord in his personality. He can neither face this feeling, nor can he accept that Cathy is a grown-up woman now, that she has to stand on her own feet without his protection. His way of dealing with this disturbing situation is to patronize her and restrict her freedom.

When Cathy and Rodolpho begin to flirt, Eddie feels hurt on two levels. The first one is the conscious level, on which his upbringing tells him to look after Cathy and protect her from any possible harm. "She is my niece and I'm responsible for her" (VFTB, 68). He is the traditional male, the head of the family, protecting his female family members from other males, who might seduce them. This is the duty his social context assigns him. The second level Eddie feels hurt is on the subconscious level. He feels hurt because although he can't have her, another man is going to have her, which is unbearable "I worked like a dog for twenty years so a punk could have her, so that's what I've done" (VFTB, 49). Orr remarks that Rodolpho is actually challenging Eddie's household possession, and that is not totally wrong that Eddie seems to be disturbed on the conscious level as well as the subconscious, the more passionate level (230).

Eddie, who cannot explain the real reason, tries to stop the couple from going out together and getting married by hiding behind the excuse of family values. As Orr asserts, Eddie's

"jealousy transforms itself into authoritarian rage" (230). Eddie shows Rodolpho that he is disturbed by the way he flirts with Cathy: "in your town you would not just drag off a girl without her permission, I mean" (VFTB, 52). Following this Eddie becomes aware that he might be giving away his feelings, and this time uses his kinship to justify his objection to their going out together: "look kid, I am not only talking about her. The more you run around like that the more chance you're takin" (VFTB, 53). If Rodolpho, an illegal immigrant, is seen around, he might get arrested by the authorities. While Eddie seems to be playing the role of a considerate uncle who cares for his niece and his relatives, who are illegal immigrants, he is actually trying to cover his inner dilemma. when he throws Rodolpho out of the house and Cathy tries to leave with Rodolpho, Eddie says: "No, you aren't going nowhere, he's the one" (VFTB, 65). These offensive remarks make Eddie's negative feelings about Rodolpho obvious to all members of the family.

Despite Eddie's efforts to conceal his dilemma with traditional codes of conduct, such statements and his general behavior towards Rodolpho make the other members of the family quite aware of Eddie's conflict. Especially his wife realizes the reason for his odd behavior and tries to warn him several times: "all right, that's her ride. What're you going to stand over her till she's forty? Eddie, I want you to stop it now, you hear me? I don't like it"

(VFTB, 36). Later she starts to sense Eddie's main problem and warns him more specifically: "well, then, be an uncle then" (VFTB,53). By the end of the play, she openly says "you want something' else, Eddie, and you can never have her!" (VFTB, 83). Eddie cannot accept this, because his incestuous passion does not fit in with his codes of kinship: "that's what you think of me, - that I have such a thought" (VFTB, 83). Even though his wife knows about his problem, he cannot open his heart to her; she is also caught up in the disapproval of codes of conduct.

Since Eddie cannot even admit his conflict to himself, he cannot solve it, and the only way out for him would be death. There is no other solution that he could find. There can be no mediation because Eddie can up, not own up his feelings and live with them whether he has her or not. Being a good man with solid values and family responsibilities, rather than a bad man who would try to possess her by force, Eddie Carbonr cannot bear the collapse of the kind of man he believes himself to be.

Being warned by his wife against his intentions about Cathy and consulting the lawyer only to realize he cannot prevent Rodolpho's and Cathy's flirtation legally, Eddie has only one alternative left: to inform against Rodolpho and Marco. Eddie is aware of the possible consequences of this, he knows that informers are socially unacceptable, and that he will be an outcast. However, as a tragic hero, he sticks to his own belief, Rodolpho

and Cathy should not be together so he proceeds and informs against the brothers although he knows it is morally wrong.

When Eddie has Rodolpho and Marco caught by the authorities, Marco accuses him in front of the neighbors saying "He killed my children! That one stole the food from my children!" (VFTB, 77), Eddie refuses because he believes that he has done everything necessary for them: "He's crazy! I give them the blankets off my bed. Six months I kept them like my brothers!" (VFTB, 77). Despite this protest, Eddie is aware that he has lost his place in the neighborhood and that no one will look at him with sympathy anymore and he has lost his respect. When he tells Beatrice " I want my respect" (VFTB, 80), he actually knows that he can never get it back; he has done one of the worst crimes for the Italian society in America. In the final confrontation, Marco kills Eddie, which is actually the only way out for him. Being a man who tries to comply with social codes, and even uses them as excuses, becoming a socially unacceptable outcast would be worse for him than death.

Eddie's behavior exemplifies Lukacs' definition of an obsessed tragic protagonist who cannot adhere to the norms of the real world. Eddie does not accept the "bit", and he fights passionately for Cathy and his pride. Miller expresses his respect for Eddie by pointing out that he "possesses and exemplifies the wondrous and humane fact that he too can be driven to what is a sacrifice of

himself for his conception, however misguided, of right, dignity, and justice" "In Bigsby, 204).

The major tragic error of Eddie Carbone is the subconscious passion he harbors for his niece Catherine. As such a relationship is forbidden by the society, Eddie cannot admit it even to himself, and throughout the play Eddie commits several mistakes and tries to use the family conventions as excuses for his behavior.

Everything Eddie does it to get rid of Rodolpho, whom he uses as a rival because he is flirting Catherine. Since Eddie is not aware of his desire of Catherine on the conscious level, this rivalry is not made obvious verbally, but can be understood from Eddie's actions. Eddie tries to get the support of his wife, Beatrice, to take out Rodolpho from Catherine's life; but she likes Rodolpho and thinks it is better for Cathy and Rodolpho to be together:

BEATRICE: He's a nice kid, what do you want from him?

EDDIE: That's nice kid? He gives me the heebie-jeebies.

(VFTB, 34).

Eddie does not like Rodolpho, so he has determined to separate the couple, hiding behind the excuse of protecting his niece. His wife's warnings were not effective enough to restrain him. As Abbotson point out "once he sets himself on a chosen course, his character leads him to destruction" (70).

In the beginning of the play, Eddie told his family the story of a neighbor's son who had informed on his illegal relatives, and had

become an outcast. Eddie knows the consequence of such an act "you'll never see him no more; a guy do a thing like that? How's he going to show his face?" (VFTR,24). Eddie's remark show both the cultural and social values as well as the significance of such a deed. Unfortunately, Eddie makes the same mistake and puts himself into the same situation. He is aware that he will be also punished for his wrong doing, become and outcast and lose everything he has got. However, he is so obsessed by the idea of separating Rodolpho and Catherine that he does not consider the results of his actions. Eddie consults Alfieri, the lawyer many times, and is told that there is nothing he can do. Alfieri advises him not to keep on holding on to Catherine "you did your job, not it's her life, wish her luck and let her go (VFTB, 48). The last time Eddie visits Alfieri is after kissing Rodolpho and learning that the couple will get married soon. In that visit, Alfieri stresses that "morally and legally, you have no rights, you cannot stop it; she is a free agent" (VFTB, 66). Eddie is unable to comprehend this fact. He is under the influence of such overwhelming emotions that no logical argument could penetrate him. Thus, against Alfieri's advice, Eddie let the immigration office know about Rodolpho and Marco, and the same night the officers came and arrested the brothers. Marco understands that this Eddie's action, and let everyone know saying "that one! I accuse that one!" (VFTB, 77). Eddie now faces a fate similar to the neighbor's child. In a

neighborhood where pride and honor are so important, Eddie has lost his honor by both his own deed and Marco's spitting into his face.

Eddie's last error is his unwillingness to make peace with Rodolpho and Marco. Eddie sent a threatening message to Marco through Rodolpho " I want my name, and you can run tell him, kid, that he's going to give it back to me in front of this neighborhood, or we have it out" (VFTB, 82). Eddie feels Marco has no right to treat his like a traitor, regardless of the conflict between him and Rodolpho, since he was the one to shelter the brothers in America. Eddie wants back his pride and dignity he lost by informing against the two brothers. He is less concerned with having harmed them than losing face in the neighborhood. The only amicable way to sort this out is to apologize to each other, but Eddie chooses to fight it out which ends up in his death.

Despite his tragic flaws that have dire consequences, Eddie cannot be classified as an evil man who does terrible things. He is a family man until his secret passion for Cathy makes him disregard his duties to his wife and his niece. He accepts his wife's relatives over and help them earn a living. Eddie is the product of his male-dominated background, he does not want his dominance to be threatened. Epstein claims that

Eddie is a tragic figure. Miller clearly feel, because in the
intransigence

Of his actions, there's an implicit fidelity to the self, integrity to
one's belief
no matter how perverse they may be. However wrong they may
have seen
and Alfieri is not unmindful of Eddie's tragic deed. Eddie
nonetheless pursues
what he regards the proper course of action (Martin, 115).

although the things he has done are wrong, Eddie had to do them
to recover his sense of self and his dignity as a man, both of which
are shattered in the end of the play. Eddie faces constant
accusations from both his wife and Alfieri on the nature of his for
his niece, which he rejects fiercely. However, deep inside, he must
have realized it or at least he must have some doubts. Miller
suggests that "Eddie exemplifies the wondrous and humane fact
that he too can be driven to scarify himself for his conception,
however misguided of right, dignity, and justice" (Epstein, 116).

Being stripped of his protective masks, Eddie finds he he has
lost everything he could count on; his image of himself, his dignity
as a man. In the end, Eddie does not learn anything from his
anguish. He does not seem to realize his desire for Cathy, he does
not repent trying to end Cathy's and Rodolpho's relationship and
he does not try to make peace with Marco. Finally, he is totally
unaware of the real reason for his own death. That all the suffering

has been wasted without any awareness of his ordeal, makes Eddie a most pitiful tragic protagonist. However, Eddie acquires a certain dignity by refusing to back down, by being faithful to his ideal, "even if the ideal is false and one's fidelity to it finally lethal", which Miller calls an "intensity of commitment" (Eagleton, 99). Even Alfieri admires him in the end because he "allowed himself to be the wholly known", to be wholly explored as who he really is" (VFTB, 85).

Conclusion

In this paper, we shed light on Arthur Miller's play *A View from the Bridge* as a modern tragedy with common tragic Greek touches. The first common feature of the protagonist is that he has innate values or beliefs that he is ready to die for them. Eddie Carbone falls because he follows his own beliefs without considering whether they are "right" or "evil". Eddie uses his values as excuses to achieve his more primitive goal, the one which is against his own principles as well, and in the end he dies. Another common feature is the love for passion and freedom and a drive to protect his dignity and the courage and endurance to do it. Eddie finds himself in a conflict with his illegal relative who is dating his niece. Seemingly this is a protective uncle's struggle to defend his niece's innocence, but it's Eddie's struggle with his own primitive instincts. The cause for this protagonist's conflict is that

the society forbids what he naturally desires. In *A View from the Bridge*, although Eddie's wife and his lawyer can empathize with him and try to offer him a solution for his problem through their advice, Eddie doesn't listen to them for two reasons. Firstly, he is at a stage in which he listens only to his own voice and no other people. Specifically, he rejects Alfieri's Beatrice's advice because they openly tell him what he does not want to know. The tragic heroes cannot be comforted by anyone and they have to rely on themselves whenever they decide to do. Hence *A View from the Bridge* can be called a modern tragedy with similar themes and codes of the Greek tragedy.

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