



Literature on ‘Literary Mode’: Tracing Generic Markers in *Oedipus Rex*, *Othello* and *Duchess of Malfi*

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Abstract— *“Literature is a matter of intentionality; the mode of appropriation by our consciousness. A text has only literary potential, which must be activated by the reader for literature to happen” (Barthes). In his essay, From Work to Text, Barthes argues that the relation between the writer, reader and observer is changed by movement from work to text. A work assumes the quality of text on performing the event of reading. Extra conceptual resources of language is the primary feature on the basis of which a literary work can be identified. Literature works on the basic principle of extra conceptuality. It is the system by which a word can get multiple interpretations, in contrast to the concept of conceptuality, whereby a specific word is attributed to an abstract concept by means of shared convention.*

Keywords— *Duchess of Malfi, Generic Markers, Genre, Literary Mode, Oedipus Rex, Othello.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Through this paper, I would like to focus on the word ‘literary’ and how a unique utterance actually becomes ‘literary’. I would also be dealing with questions like ‘what forms the literary system?’, ‘what does the text borrow from the literary tradition?’, ‘what is established in the literary system that creates a horizon of expectation?’, and also trace the history of change in literary conventions by tracing the travel of generic markers across time and space.

II. LITERARY MODE AS EXPERIENCED THROUGH LITERATURE

A literary mode as a concrete phenomenon emerges and is experienced through the event of literature. The phenomenon of literature binds together in an experiential whole the performativity of the literary work as it relates to the appropriative stance of the reader. So literature is characterized by a dialogic institutionality; it is not logically or formally structured, but concretely conceived only through the relation between reader and text, i.e. experientially.

Mode doesn’t imply prescriptions for content and form. A literary mode indicates particular and concrete ways of being made present in and through speech utterance, rather than linguistic structures related by isolated manipulation of symbols. In literature and other artistic media, a mode is an unspecified critical term usually designating a broad but identifiable kind of literary method, mood or manner that is not tied exclusively to a particular form or genre.

“Literature is more of a functional term than an ontological term” (Syeed). There is no god-given difference between a literary and a non-literary text. The difference lies only in the event of reading the texts, pragmatic and non-pragmatic. The essence of literature lies in the relation between the text and the reader and thereby in the act of reading. It requires an active reader for the event of reading to take place. The essence of literature is determined by the aim of the author, the performativity of the text and the appropriate stance of the reader. Thus, it would be right to say that performativity is itself a marker of literature. Performativity is how the text is put together. Mode, genre, form, generic markers and thematic elements are all about the performativity of the text meaning how the text enacts the metaphor.

A literary work happens when the author deliberately makes a certain choice of words and addresses the readers through different formal configurations called genres. The mode of address and the tone of the work is determined by the particular arrangement of thematic and generic conventions.

III. LITERARY GENRES AS HISTORICAL CATEGORIES

According to a critic, "a genre is any group of works selected on the basis of some shared features". Ralph Cohen details in his essay 'History and genre' some of the defining features of a genre and how genres are open categories without fixed absolute features. According to him, genre has been defined in terms of meter, inner form, and intrinsic form, radical of presentation, single traits, family traits, institutions, conventions and contrasts. Genre concepts in theory and practice arise, change and decline for historical reasons. Further he adds, since each genre is composed of texts that accrue, the grouping is a process and not a determinate category. Genres are open categories. The processes by which genres are established always involve the human need for distinction and inter relation.

According to Derrida, 'Literature' can be considered a genre which include novel, elegy and so forth. It is a genre that includes other genres that define it; again, a genre can intermix genres as a novel can contain poems, proverbs, sermons and so forth. For Derrida, no generic trait completely or absolutely confines a text to a genre or class because such belonging falsifies the constituents of a text.

Genres do not exist by themselves; they are named and placed within hierarchies or systems of genres and each is defined by reference to the system and its members. In Frye's opinion, "genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public". Further he points out that, "Generic distinctions are among the ways in which literary works are ideally presented, whatever the actualities are". Similar is the opinion shared by Frederic Jameson as well. According to him, "genre is a literary institution, is a social contract between a writer and a particular public whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artefact". Like Frye, he argues that genres exist in performance significance, but he notes that genres do undergo changes, as texts free themselves more and more from an immediate performance situation; it becomes ever more difficult to enforce a given generic rule on their readers.

According to Jauss, "the new text evokes for the reader the horizon of expectations and rules of the genre familiar to him earlier texts, which as such can then be varied,

extended, corrected but also transformed, crossed out, or simply reproduced. Variation, extension and correction determine the latitude of a generic structure, a break with the convention on the one hand and mere reproduction on the other determines its boundaries".

It can be briefed that genre is how the literary event or literary work is shaped. Genres are open systems that are made by critics to fill certain ends. Each genre is related to and defined by others to which it is related. Every type of classifications are historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences and critics in order to sense communicative and aesthetic purposes. Such groupings arise at particular historical moments and are subjected to repeated definitions or abandonment.

Moreover, genres are historical and thus it has to be placed in the literary history of the language. According to Jauss, "The relationship of literature and reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications. The aesthetic implication is seen in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of the aesthetic value in comparison with works which he has already read". A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in different periods. Thus a literary work is to be understood as creating a dialogue and philological scholarship has to be founded on a continuous re-reading of texts and not on mere facts. The historical context in which a literary work appears is not a factual, independent series of events which exists apart from the reader.

According to Sisir Kumar Das, Literary history is the "record of texts produced in different periods as well as of the simultaneous existence of texts produced in different periods". Further, he adds that "it is also possible to look at it as a history of reception and survival of texts and authors, as well as of genres and themes". Literary history may be identified as a narrative of relations between the residual, dominant and the emergent tools as described by Raymond Williams. Literary history includes the generic, thematic conventions and also different signs that the writer create or borrowed from other languages or medium of expression. Literary history gives an account or a record of the different conventions and their role in the generation of individual literary works, thereby detailing how the works differ or share similarity from the conventions that comprise the literary tradition in the language. Literary history traces the journey of form and content present in a literary tradition, which further gives the tradition a concrete shape. Literary tradition is peculiar to the language in which it is written as it includes the linguistic and thematic conventions available across time in that language. The history of a literary period, where some

themes and forms are dominant, is a record of the changes that arises as a result of interactions between the residual and dominant elements of the literary form in a literary work, forming a record of a part of the general history of a society and people. Thus the real object of literary history is not what the individuals think or do, but the outcome of their thought and action, that is the text themselves and the relations between them. Literary historiography details the history of change in literary conventions.

As detailed by Sisir Kumar Das in his essay titled 'The Idea of Literary History', Literary history is a 'story of change', which may or may not cause any perceptible disorder within a literary system. In literary history, the texts themselves represent the past and what is dealt within the domain of historiography is the relationships between the works that cannot simply be explained within a unilinear temporal scheme as history is multiple.

The historiographer further makes it clear that "changes can be 'internal', i.e. certain rearrangement of items or innovations within the systems leading to a noticeable difference and thus opening up the possibilities of introducing something that did not exist before ". This can be explained by detailing about genres which are identified using certain generic markers that may vary across time and space. Markers are residual and thus they may arise out of the horizon of expectation of readers. Either they will be confined by the horizon or they will break the horizon of expectation. Even in Aristotle, generic markers are not absolute; they indicate stages through which a genre passes. Moreover, the traits that are shared do not necessarily share the same function. Trait sharing may be, but need not be the way to characterize a genre. A genre doesn't exist independently; it arises to compete or contrast with other genres to complement, augment or interrelate with other genres. A generic marker is made of something which is an element of the text, which is residual. But residual doesn't occur in itself. It interacts with elements that are contemporary to the new text.

IV. IDENTIFICATION OF 'TRAGEDY' AS A GENRE ON THE BASIS OF GENERIC MARKERS

This paper tries to identify the genre on the basis of generic marker, because there is a difference between the uses of marker in each case. A marker becomes necessary both for the similarities and also for the differences, so that the text can be located in a particular structure of feeling. For my purpose here, I focus on 'tragedy' as a genre and has tried to identify the travel of two generic markers of the genre, 'Anagnorisis' and 'Peripetia', across time and space locating them within a particular structure of feeling

(which is influenced by the residual, dominant and emergent elements) and the horizon of expectation that is predicated on an informed reader and that an uniformed reader finds out through reading.

According to Sisir Kumar Das, "the evolution of Greek genres are the finest examples of internal changes that happens in a literary system". Aristotle in his treatise titled 'Poetics' has mentioned that both tragedy and comedy originated in improvisations: ". . . the one originated with the authors of the Dithyramb, the other with those of the phallic songs". Further he adds, "Aeschylus first introduced a second actor; he diminished the importance of the Chorus, and assigned the leading part to the dialogue. Sophocles raised the number of actors to three, and added scene-painting." (Poetics, IV) Here, Aristotle emphasizes the role of many in the formation of the new genre without denying the role of individuals.

Tragedy is a diachronic literary system that has been written across different time periods absorbing and leaving out different cultural elements with which it has been in contact. Thus 'what is tragedy' becomes more of a cultural system. Tragedy is constructed based on how tragedy is perceived at the time of its writing. Thus, it has some kind of relation with what a particular culture considers evil and what they consider noble. So, it is from that structure of feeling that a connection is made between form and content. Structure gives form to the content. Both of these taken together either have used the generic markers in one way and they break the convention of generic marker.

According to Aristotle, tragedy evolved from the satyr dithyramb, an ancient Greek hymn, which was sung along with dancing in honour of Dionysus that includes practices like sacrifice of goats where a song ritual called *trag-odia* was sung. Indeed, Dionysus became known as the god of theatre and perhaps a different connection was made with regard to drinking rites which resulted in the worshipper losing full control of their emotions and in effect becoming another person, similar to actors while they were performing.

Performed in an open-air theatre such as that of Dionysos in Athens and seemingly open to all of the male populace, the plot of a tragedy was almost always inspired by episodes from Greek mythology and thus dealt with moral right and wrongs. Moreover, no violence was permitted on the stage and the death of a character had to be heard from offstage and not seen. The early tragedies had only one actor who would perform in costume and wear a mask, allowing him the presumption of impersonating a God. It is believed that later, Thespis innovated the idea of an actor speaking to the head of the chorus, a group of up to 15 actors who sang and danced but did not speak. The first

of the great tragedian poets was Aeschylus, who added a second actor for minor parts. The second great poet of the genre was Sophocles, who added a third actor to the proceedings and employed painted scenery. The last of the classic tragedy poets was Euripides, known for his clever dialogues, fine choral lyrics and certain realism in his text and stage presentation.

Aristotle in his treatise titled *Poetics* derived his theory on tragedies by looking at the plays that were already staged in Athens and thus he was not giving 'rules' per se. He gives a generalized opinion on tragedy and derived theories regarding the different quantitative parts of tragedy and other features of tragedy. According to him, "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions." (Poetics, IV)

Every tragedy in his opinion must have six parts that determine its quality, namely, Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle and Song. Similarly, every tragedy has to have quantitative parts, namely, Prologue, Episode, Choric song; the last being divided into Parosmia and Stasimon. Then he divides the plots into two kinds; simple or complex depending on the absence or presence of Anagnorisis or Peripetia respectively. According to Aristotle, a perfect tragedy would be following a complex plan in which the change is accompanied by reversal or by recognition or both.

"Recognition, combined with Reversal, will produce either pity or fear; and actions producing these effects are those which, by our definition, Tragedy represents. Moreover, it is upon such situations that the issues of good or bad fortune will depend." (Poetics, XI)

Thus, it is clear that Recognition or change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune and Peripetia or Reversal, the change in which the action veers round to its opposite are important features of a tragedy and thus they represent the generic markers in the genre of Tragedy.

In the following sections, I will be tracing the travel of the two generic markers as it is used in three tragedies, namely, *Oedipus Rex*, *Othello* and *Duchess of Malfi* by Sophocles, Shakespeare and Webster from Athenian age, Elizabethan Age and Jacobean Age respectively.

V. TRACING GENERIC MARKERS IN OEDIPUS REX OR OEDIPUS THE KING

Sophocles was one of the most famous writers of tragedy in ancient Greece. His work is not only a record of Greek theatre but also provides an insight into many of the political and social aspects of ancient Greece, family relations to details of Greek religion. *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus the King* is the first play in the trilogy of *Oedipus* followed by *Oedipus at Colonus* and then *Antigone*.

The play *Oedipus the King* follows the story of King Oedipus of Thebes as he discovers that he has unwittingly killed his own father, Laius and married his own mother, Jocasta. Oedipus was raised by different parents, for his parents feared the prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother. As an adult, Oedipus is told by an oracle that the plague on his people will end when the murderer of Laius is caught and exiled. Oedipus visits a prophet Thesias who tells him he is the murderer. Believing he is innocent, Oedipus is angered. His wife, trying to calm him down, tells him of Laius's murder. Oedipus upon hearing the story, suspects he may have been the murderer. A messenger arrives to tell Oedipus his father Polybus has died. Oedipus rejoices that he has not murdered his father, but still fears he may marry his mother. The messenger, hoping to ease his fears, tells him that Polybus and his wife were not his real parents. Rather than easing his fears, the messenger reveals the dark truth to Oedipus; he has fulfilled the prophecy. With all now finally revealed, Oedipus curses himself and his tragic destiny and stumbles off, as the Chorus laments how even a great man can be felled by fate. A servant enters and explains that Jocasta, when she had begun to suspect the truth, had run to the palace bedroom and hanged herself there. Oedipus enters, deliriously calling for a sword so that he might kill himself and raging through the house until he comes upon Jocasta's body. In final despair, Oedipus takes two long pins from her dress and plunges them into his own eyes.

"In *Oedipus*, the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus and free him from his alarms about his mother, but by revealing who he is, he produces the opposite effect." (Poetics, XI) In *Oedipus the King*, the Recognition is coincident with the Reversal of situation. Recognition or Anagnorisis is the change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortunes and Peripetia or Reversal of situation is the change in which the action veers round to its opposite. In the story the messenger says, "You and Polybus were not related." Here, by revealing the true identity of Oedipus, the messenger actually pushes Oedipus into the dark hands of fate. Oedipus cries out in pain, "It was Apollo. He brought on these troubles-/ the awful things I suffer. But the hand/ which stabbed out my eyes was mine alone/ In my wretched life, why should I

have eyes/ when nothing I could see would bring me joy?" On realizing that he has done what he feared, Oedipus has no other choice but to pull out his eyes. In Sophocles' time kinship was valued, so when kinship is violated tragedy happens.

VI. TRACING GENERIC MARKERS IN OTHELLO

William Shakespeare is regarded as the greatest dramatist in the English Language who composed his works during the Elizabethan age. *Othello* is one of his well known plays written during his third period of writing which was supposed to be a period of sadness and philosophical contemplation in his life.

Othello takes place in 16th century Venice and also in Cyprus. Othello who is a noble black warrior in the Venetian army marries a beautiful white woman called Desdemona who is the daughter of a prominent senator named Brabantio. When he eventually finds out, he who was of high opinion on Othello turns completely furious and decides to disown Desdemona. Meanwhile, Iago who has a secret jealousy and resentment towards Othello because of his suspicion that Othello has been cheating with his wife Emilia and that a lower ranked soldier named Cassio has been put in high ranks has added fuel to the fire within him. Waiting for revenge, Iago plans to plant suspicion in Othello's mind that Desdemona was having an affair with Cassio. He initiated a planned street fight for which Cassio is blamed and is then dismissed from his post by Othello. Desdemona takes up Cassio's case with her husband, which only increases his suspicions. While all of this is happening, Iago manages to find a handkerchief from Desdemona that was given to her by Othello. Iago somehow manages to leave the handkerchief with Cassio and creates a situation for Othello to see it. Finally on seeing it, Othello concludes that the possession is proof of their affair. Due to sexual jealousy, he orders Iago to murder Cassio and he decides to strangle Desdemona. However, after immediately killing her, Othello realizes the truth through Emilia. Othello becomes aware of Desdemona's innocence and Iago's treachery. Othello then goes to the senate to detail about Iago's treachery and to reveal the crime committed by him.

In this play, the Reversal of the situation happens when in Act III Scene iii, Othello decides to kill Desdemona believing Iago's words. Othello spits out thus, "Let her be damned-that immoral woman, let us withdraw for a space. I shall retire and supply myself with some quick method of killing this beautiful devil. Henceforth, you will be my lieutenant." On taking such a decision, Othello has made a move to reverse his life from what it could have been. The

climax and thereby the recognition of the character happens in the final scene when Othello becomes aware of Desdemona's innocence and Iago's treachery through Emilia. He exclaims, "O, what a fool I have been! What a fool I have been!" However, once he committed the murder and thus there is no going back. He was obliged to inform the senate of his deeds and thereby he is to be punished.

VII. TRACING GENERIC MARKERS IN DUCHESS OF MALFI

John Webster is a major literary figure who composed plays, mainly revenge dramas during the last decade of the 16th century and early decades of the 17th century. The age was known for pessimism which had its causes in both political and religious spheres. *Duchess of Malfi* was constructed around the conflict of the stoical protagonist with the Machiavellian antagonist.

The Duchess of Malfi, the central figure in the tragedy despite being warned by her brothers to not remarry, has resolved to marry her steward Antonia. Even though she keeps the marriage secret, Bosola the spy appointed by her brothers finds out the truth during the advanced stage of her pregnancy by giving her an apricot, which in turn could initiate labour pain in a pregnant woman. Even though Antonia tries to cover the delivery from the members of the palace, the horoscope that had mistakenly fallen from his hands finds place in Bosola's hands and thus he confirms that a son is born to the Duchess. He sends information to the brothers. The brothers being furious about the happenings threatens to kill the duchess and her husband who brought dishonour to their family. Ferdinand, one of her brothers, gives her a dagger thereby that she should kill herself. The duchess, apprehending the danger, secretly arranges for the Antonia to Ancona and gives out that he has been dismissed from service for misappropriation. However, suspecting her actions, Bosola praises Antonia for his noble qualities and thus gains the confidence of the Duchess. Seeing that Bosola is an admirer of Antonia she reveals her marriage to him and Bosola thus informs the brothers about the reality. Later, Bosola under the instruction of Ferdinand tortures and murder the Duchess. However, Bosola refuses to reward Bosola as he is unable to bear the sight of his sister's dead face. He is filled with deep repentance and becomes mad. Later follows a series of killings in which only the son of the Duchess and Antonia survives to inherit the estate and properties.

In the *Duchess of Malfi*, the Reversal of situation happens when Ferdinand and Cardinal happen to know about the Duchess's marriage to Antonia as it is mentioned in the

first scene itself that the brothers had warned the Duchess not to remarry and bring dishonour to their family. The climax or the recognition happens when Ferdinand is unable to see his dead sister's face which leads him to refuse reward to Bosola and thereby leading to a number of killings.

It is clear that while all the three tragedies have the presence of the markers 'Anagnorisis' and 'Peripetia', they undergo a change with respect to the Structure of Feeling and Horizon of Expectation of the audience. To detail the Structure of Feeling as seen in different time periods, it demands knowledge of the worldview at that time period along with the location and time in which the author was located and the expectations as set by the audience during the time period.

VIII. ANALYZING OEDIPUS REX, OTHELLO AND DUCHESS OF MALFI

In the essay titled 'Marxism and Literature', Raymond Williams describes 'Residual' as "having been formed in the past but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present." These residual elements also occur in works that share a literary culture as seen in Greek myths. A literary period is a time period in which certain thematic and formal elements are 'dominant'. But this doesn't prevent differences in aesthetic aims and poetic practices by individual writers. The differences arise out of the difference in the structure of feeling of the time in which the work is written. The Structure of Feeling is the "practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter relating continuity." According to Buchanan, it refers to "different ways of thinking vying to emerge at any one time in history."

The play *Oedipus the King* is replete with oracles and mysteries surrounding the life of people and determining the fate of every character in the play. Human beings are portrayed as mere victims in the hands of fate and in this play, tragedy happens when the characters deviate or violate the path of kinship. Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother and all this happens despite his attempts to not fall under the hands of fate. He moves away from his place fearing that he might fulfil the prophecy. But the playwright has shown that man cannot escape from the clutches of fate and that he has to undergo the ordeal whatever his position in the society is.

Talking a bit about the Ancient Greek society in which this play was written, it can be seen that religion in ancient Greece was more direct, personal and present in all areas of life. People looked for signs from the gods in everyday life and to interpret these signs as indicators of future

events. Moreover, there were many rites which were open to be known only by the initiated that performed them. Priests who orchestrated different religious ceremonies and delivered prayers were common in the age. Thus the poet has made a choice of words and themes in his play deriving a relation with the Structure of Feeling of his time. The Recognition and the Reversal of situation in the play both happens when the character identifies his true kinship and thereby the realization that he has violated the rule of kinship.

Moreover, the plays of the Athenian age consisted of larger-than-life themes. Man was seen as totally subservient to fate and thus men believed in oracles. The larger-than-life experiences is further explained by the use of masks. The mask is known to have been used since the time of Aeschylus and considered to be one of the iconic conventions of classical Greek theatre. The mask transformed the actor as much as the memorization of the text. Moreover, the mask serves as a resonator for the head, thus enhancing vocal acoustics and altering its quality. The masks also helped in creating large scale panic especially since they had intensely exaggerated facial features and expressions. They enable an actor to reappear in several different roles, thus preventing the audience from identifying the actor to one specific character.

The earliest Greek theatres consisted of a large open space with stepped seating. According to 5th century BCE Greek pottery decoration the stage was built around one metre above the ground and steps at the front. Keeping in mind the location in which the audience are seated, it is clear that the audience would have enjoyed the play by hearing dialogues and by looking at the costumes and masks that revealed the identity of the characters.

The play *Othello* and *Duchess of Malfi* was written during the Elizabethan period and Jacobean Age respectively. During the time of Shakespeare and reigns of Queen of Elizabeth I and King James I, English ideas and sex and gender, the legal rights of women and the social expectations of femininity all played a significant role in the way that theatre was performed, the stories it told and who told them. In addition to other legal restrictions on the rights of women, there was considerable social pressure on women to behave according to specific social roles. Women were expected to be subservient, quiet and homebound, with their primary ambitions entirely confined to marriage, childbirth and homemaking.

In *Othello*, tragedy happens when Othello suspects his wife Desdemona to have an affair with his lieutenant Cassio. The Reversal of situation or Peripetia happens when he believes Iago's words and decides to kill

Desdemona for having cheated him and Recognition happens after the death of Desdemona, when he comes to know about the truth from Emilia. In *Duchess of Malfi* tragedy happens when the Duchess remarries her steward. The Reversal of situation or Peripetia occurs when her brothers come to know about her secret marriage to Antonio, her steward and Recognition happens when Ferdinand is unable to see the dead face of his sister and thereby refuses to reward Bosola for what he did thereby resulting in mass killings.

The cause for tragedy as put forward by the playwrights is related to the Structure of Feeling of the period which carries in it the elements absorbed from the world view and the poet's personal experiences in relation to his society. *Othello* was written during the 16th century when the Elizabethan ideals were at its maximum and when he was facing a period of dismay and failure. Private misfortunes weighed heavily upon his heart and he gave vent to his feelings of sorrow in his plays. His son was dead. His father died probably soon after he had written his *Twelfth Night*. His friend had deserted him. It is quite clear that the poet bade farewell to the tales of mirth and love, ceased to care for the stir and movement of history, for the pomp of wars. He was now feeling depths of sorrow in his heart and he tried to ventilate those feelings in his dramas. Most of the works written during the period deal with the dark side and the gloomy passion of human life and character and it has therefore been surmised that they are the outcome of a period of gloom and sorrow in the poet's life. He paints the vices and follies of men and women, their sins and passions, their sorrows and misfortunes, their weaknesses and strength, treacherous friends and open enemies, base flatterers and sincere friends and the cruel fate and avenging conscience that overtakes and kills them.

The characters in *Othello* are themselves a reflection of Elizabethan ideals. Elizabethan renaissance is known for exploring the moral drama of men in that time. Elizabethan tragedy dealt with heroic themes usually centering on a great personality who is destroyed by his own passion and ambition. *Othello* is portrayed as a general who hails from a royal family and there was this blood of kings and princes running through his veins who was doomed to fail because of the sexual jealousy in him. Iago represents the Elizabethan man who strives to succeed in life and Desdemona represents the ideal Elizabethan woman who is gentle, quiet and loving destined to lead a married life. Further, the characters face the tragic suffering because of the passions in them which can be rooted back to the Elizabethan ideals as well as to the poet's experiences.

Shakespearean tragedies are tragedies of character. The suffering and calamities of the hero in a Shakespearean tragedy are not a supernatural visitation. They proceed from some weak traits in the character of the hero, from ruin to ruin and ultimately envelop him in disaster. A tragic hero in Shakespeare is the author of his own woes, who through some flaw in his own character, brings the hornet nest about his ears. This presents a striking contrast to the Greek tragedy in which the hero is the scape-goat of a mocking destiny.

Moreover, the Elizabethan audience was popular with the peoples, because all sections of the community were interested in it. The audiences came from all sections of London life. They were often noisy and unruly with the young lords just as likely to show off as the rougher members, but in the mass, they had vigour and a variety of taste that would never have been found in a more select audience paying higher prices. Crowded into the tiny playhouse, close enough to the actors to be able to touch them, Shakespeare's audience roared their delight when they were pleased and quickly showed their disapproval when they were not pleased. This finds mention when it comes to the themes of plays written. The plays were written such that they could cater to the likes and interest of the audience.

In the case of *Duchess Malfi*, written during the reign of James I, the pessimism of the age finds way in the construction of the play. The Age of Webster comprising the last decade of the 16th century and early decades of the 17th is an age of transition. By this time the Renaissance impulse has exhausted itself, the Elizabethan zest for life has gone and the Elizabethan exuberance and optimism has been succeeded by a mood of apprehension, disillusionment and defeat.

The pessimism that runs throughout the play and the brutal torture and murder done to the Duchess roots back to a number of political and religious causes. There was a widespread feeling of uncertainty and instability, in the latter years of the reign of Elizabeth caused mainly by the memory of the crisis of the past three accessions and of the series of plots to assassinate the Queen throughout her reign. And this combined with the knowledge that there was no obvious heir to the throne after her death. The situation reached the zenith in the rebellion of Essex. Then it was generally recognized that James was the probable heir. However, his personal unpopularity added to the feeling of uncertainty and danger even greater than that of the last years of Elizabeth. Similarly there were religious causes also for the mood of fear and anxiety which overtook the nation during the early years of the 17th century. The Puritans and Jesuits fought with each other.

The extravagance and immorality of the Court under James I, his ignorance of the English tongue and the consequent failure to communicate with the people, his uncouth appearance and awkward manners, his theory of the Divine Right of Kings advanced as a justification of his despotic rule and the fact that his Queen was a Catholic all contributed to his unpopularity and antagonism of the people. "The times were out of joint and pessimism and satire are the natural results of the dissatisfaction with the existing order." Thus the literature of the age too was filled with themes of decay, dissolution, disease, sickness and death.

IX. CONCLUSION

The relation between any two periods of a literary history is not fully investigated with the acknowledgement of the co-existence of inherited texts and contemporary texts alone because every period is distinct with the presence of at least the residual, emergent and the dominant elements within it. Tragedy is a diachronic tradition that has been written across time thus maintaining the concept of 'tragedy' and thereby the two generic markers that make a tragedy to be a residual element. Considering the ages in which Sophocles, Shakespeare and Webster have written the plays, it is clear that the Structure of Feeling and the Horizon of Expectation was totally different in each period. While in Sophocles' period, it was the violation of kinship that made tragedy happen, it was the violation of Divine right to kingship and violation of moral and gender norms that led to tragedy in Shakespeare's age. Similarly it was the innate pessimism and melancholy in Webster's period that led to tragedy.

Shakespeare and Webster use the generic markers from Aristotle's prescription of tragedy but the form changes according to the Structure of Feeling of the time. Even though all three plays are in dramatic mode, tragedy is constructed based on how tragedy is perceived at the time and also based on other value systems like kinship and Kingship which are either part of the dominant culture or deviant from it. Generic markers work just like thematic elements as residual, emergent and dominant. Thus it can be said that even while the generic markers of the tragedy, namely, 'Anagnorisis' and 'Peripetia' was present in all the three plays, the cause or the situations in the three plays varies according to the Structure of Feeling of the period and the Horizon of Expectations of the audience.

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