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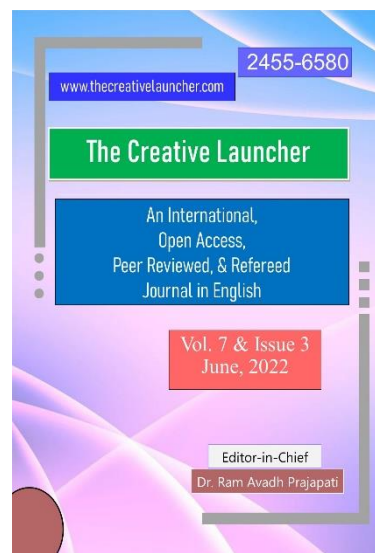
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## Dramaturgy: Exploring the Elements of Shakespearean Tragedy with the Perspectives of R. Srinivasa Iyengar

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### Abstract

R. Srinivasa Iyengar has presented his views on William Shakespeare's art of dramaturgy in his noteworthy work; *Shakespeare: His World and His Art*. It was published in 1964 and was received enthusiastically by lovers of literature. The work has finally been divided by Iyengar into fifteen chapters. The purpose of present study is to discuss Iyengar's view on Shakespeare's tragedy in detail. His love for the Shakespeare's artistic sense was cherished by

his mother who was fond of literature specially of Shakespeare. He received a book *Tales and Travels by Hugh Laurence* as second prize when he was in fourth class (1916-1917). It was signed by the principal, K.C. Viraraghava Iyer and the family has still preserved it. Iyengar loved great literature and so, generally speaking there were no favorites as such in his literary world. But two names were very close to heart: William Shakespeare and Sri Aurobindo. His first encounter with Shakespeare was through reading Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in 1922. The impact of this first encounter with Shakespeare lasted through his life time. Such was his phenomenal memory that long after he gave up reading due to loss of vision, just a year prior to his passing away, he could name the character, act and scene from all the plays of Shakespeare when just a single line from any of the plays represented in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1941) was read out to him. He loved teaching Shakespeare's plays and had acquired an enormous amount of matter on the subject. It was natural that the approaching quarter centenary of the Bard of Avon galvanized him into action.

**Keywords:** Genesis, Vaulting Pride, Catharsis, Redemption, Transmutation

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar divides Shakespearean tragedy into three categories namely Early Tragedy, Great Tragedy and Later Tragedy. The Early Tragedy deals with the question of crime and punishment. Iyengar here traces the genesis of crime, and explains the impact of Evil on man in detail. In Great Tragedy he considers four points to apprehend the real nature of Tragedy viz. the tragic world which is both fair and foul, the forces that govern it such as love, ambition, pride, jealousy and misanthropy, the tragic hero who is usually like us and the final impression that the tragic spectacle leaves i.e. 'It is better as it is' that is to say, we endure the suffering of the hero and others and yet enjoy it. Later Tragedy explains and compares the structural unity of different plays of Shakespeare.

In Early Tragedy Iyengar says that Shakespearean Tragedy derives ultimately from Roman and Greek tragedy on the one hand and the medieval religious spectacle of the dance of death on the other. Defining tragedy Iyengar says that tragedy is a dramatic presentation of 'crime and punishment' working in a background of unpredictable chance. There are the powers of hate and Nemesis hovering around, and although the gods are in heaven, all is not right with the world. In the words of Iyengar somehow; somewhere; the settled order is disturbed, and there is a release of primordial forces which it becomes increasingly difficult to control. Discussing different sources of evil the writer says that 'sin' is the taint within infecting the individuals' mind and soul, and 'crime' is the tainted action and its consequences to others and to the 'commonwealth' at large. Sin is more elemental than crime, yet only crime is punishable.

Iyengar discusses the theory of sin and punishment in detail. He is of the opinion that 'sin' is, indeed, more elemental than crime, for it is really crime in a seminal condition. Crime runs to its source. Sin rots the soul inwardly, but crime affects others as well, damaging or destroying them, where the punishment is inflicted by the victim or by his immediate 'kith and kin', it takes the form of 'revenge'; where however, society or the collectivity as a whole takes punitive action against the criminal, such action takes the colour of 'punishment' yet the sinner

or the criminal himself is hardly affected by the punishment from outside, for physical punishment cannot touch or redeem the soul, only remorse and repentance can. Iyengar touches every aspect of human activity. He proves his philosophy of sin and punishment by giving the example of *Macbeth* where Macbeth sins by wanting to kill his own kinsman and king, his generous benefactor and unsuspecting guest; The actual killing of Duncan, which soon follows, translates the festering sin into a bloody crime. Before the actual killing and afterwards Macbeth inhabits a hell of his own creation. When Macduff kills him at last, 'punishment may be taken to have overtaken the criminal; but even so how can this 'punishment' compare with the enormity of his first crime and his attendant crimes, or even with his own soul's travail from the first half formed murderous thought to the final act of the tragedy before Birnam Wood? Since the real author of a crime is the flawed or the sin-infected soul, it is not so much the body's torture or annihilation as the soul's awakening and regeneration that can really redeem it. Persistence in a career of sin (and crime) can lead only to the soul's damnation for the wages of sin is death – spiritual and not alone physical death, but sin or crime followed by sincere repentance will certainly redeem the soul, and perhaps, instead of terrestrial punishment there may be a forgiving and forgetting of the nightmarish past. We cannot say that the terms sin, damnation and redemption are applicable when we view the person from inside, and crime, punishment and forgiving are appropriate when we view him from the outside.

There is a world within and a world without; and each world would appear to be governed by laws peculiar to itself. Never the less the two worlds, however juxtaposed in terms of apparent contradiction, are ultimately one in essence. Iyengar favours a principle that governs both of them. According to him order and harmony are the universal law while disorder and discord are sudden unaccountable irruptions that seek to destroy the order and harmony. For a time discord persists, and widening waves of disturbance ensue; only when the violence is spent (or has been mastered) can harmony return. Iyengar says that there is evil lurking in nature, there is evil active in the very environment sometimes and evil obscurely invades the heart of man and contaminates his soul. Evil is like the invisible bacillus that enters and multiplies in the human body, corrupting and rotting it in the process. For a time invasion is hardly noticed, it is only noticed only later, when the poisonous results are explosively evident. The assault of evil on man makes him sin, and when it blazes up in action, it shocks the world as crime. Now the crime can in its turn infect others with the parent sin, and so evil cunningly fabricates its own vicious circle, crime and more crime, a crescendo of horror piled upon horror.

Iyengar asks whether evil is dark magic of Maya. Is it no more than a temporary mist that clouds the human vision for a time, to disappear presently, revealing the clear Sun of Truth? We inhabit a world of dualities. We are susceptible to pain. We are conscious of the dark currents of evil in the field of human thought and action. So long as the higher knowledge that can alone pierce the dualities and touch transcendence is denied to us, we shall continue to traffic with such terms as sin, damnation and redemption, crime, punishment and forgiving

Iyengar now proceeds to show how European tragedy had its origin in Hellas. He says that Oresteia is still the supreme example of tragedy. He also refers to Aeschylus's other extant plays-notably *Prometheus Bound* and *The Seven Against Thebes* in which Aeschylus demonstrates how the presumptuous man struggles constantly against all- powerful destiny.

Iyengar takes up the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles which raises the dignity of man. It lays down that man suffers because he is great of soul. There is no need to justify the gods because they are always just. It is man, who stands in the need of justification; Euripides on the contrary is the last of the ancients and the first of the moderns. He believed that neither man nor gods inspired reverence. His themes are therefore unconventional: Medea kills her children; Phaedra falls in love with her step son and on being repulsed encompasses her death. Hercules kills his wife and children. Centuries after Euripides came Seneca, who was the exemplar of Euripides. The horror element is for more pronounced in Seneca than Euripides. The plays of Seneca are devoid of high ethical motives but they feature striking dramatic situations and show perfect metrical mastery. They yield a number of sentences which ring like proverbs. No wonder then that it was Seneca who inspired Italian, French and English playwrights like Kyd and Shakespeare. Kyd, according to Iyengar, was Seneca's most successful pupil. The University Wits and following them Shakespeare all attempted a co-existence of Seneca and the native tradition.

After giving the details of Pre-Shakespearean tragedy Iyengar examines Shakespeare's first essay in tragedy *Titus Andronicus*. Iyengar agrees with the view of Alexander when the latter says, "And he [Shakespeare] had to make what he could of it". Titus Andronicus, the Roman General, has lost 21 out of his 25 sons while waging war against the barbarian Goths. Returning victorious to Rome with Tamora the Queen of the Goths and her three sons as captives, he sacrifices her eldest son, Alarbus, so that the 'shadows' of his own dead sons may be appeased. Iyengar sees in this tragedy a marked similarity with the *Troades* of Seneca, where the young Astyanax is killed in the same way as Tamora's son Alarbus. Scarcely Alarbus is carried away by Titus' sons than Demetrius, one of her surviving sons, urges Tamora to sharp revenge to "quit the bloody wrongs upon her foes" (I.i.141). A conspiracy of circumstances favours the execution of her sinister plans for revenge. Apart from the sacrifice of Alarbus, other Senecan touches which obtain in the play are "cooking of Chiron and Demetrius (as in the Thyestes), the scene of the murder of Bassianus (as in the Hercules Furens), and Titus' funeral speech (I, i.150-6) which seems to be an echo of a speech in the Thyestes."<sup>2</sup> Besides Seneca there are some parts of story which have been determined from other sources. The cutting off of the tongue of Lavinia glances at the Ovidian story of Philomela. The Aaron story has its analogue in Bandello's *Novella*, in which a Moorish slave kills his master's wife, makes him cut off his nose promising to spare his sons but breaks his promise at last. Shakespeare has no doubt taken the main lines of his play from the *Novella* but he has changed the diabolical figure anticipating creatures of pure malignity like Don John, Iago and Edmund

Iyengar agrees with the view of Shakespeare's tragic world that, man is himself largely the architect of his own destiny, and if he sins or goes astray or ruins himself, it is not because forces altogether beyond his control are ranged against him. Always, it is said, Shakespeare's heroes are betrayed by what is false within. This is an oversimplification of the dynamics of moral causation in Shakespearean Tragedy. Shakespeare has been at pains to show how the hero's misfortunes have some relation to his own errors of commission and omission. On the other hand, even granted that some of Titus' actions were ethically wrong, there is no recognizable equivalence between the wrong actions and the terrible consequences.

Summing up his views on *Titus Andronicus*, Iyengar says ‘Although it is but Shakespeare’s first sketch in Tragedy, although the shadow of Seneca or of the shadow of the supposed image of Seneca moulded by his Italian disciples; blurs its intention, in *Titus* could still be seen the germs of Lear’s self-wrought isolation, Othello’s grave naiveté, and Hamlet’s ambiguous madness. Just as *The Comedy of Errors* could be described as a piece of cram that comprises a diversity of comic motifs, *Titus Andronicus* too is a piece of cram in which Shakespeare has assembled with a young man’s assiduity and enthusiasm all the elements that he could think of as material for tragic drama. War with the Goths: disputed succession in Rome: rivalry in love: blood sacrifice: adultery: rape: murder: mutilation: double-dealing: sadistic cruelty: madness: impersonation: blood-bath’... all come into the picture.

After *Titus*, Iyengar takes up *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare, says Iyengar, had essayed only two types of tragedy so far, *Titus* and the interludes, *Pyramus* and *Thisbe* played before the married couples in *A Dream*. In *Titus* as we have seen, there is some casual talk of love, it is often lust and sordid calculation that is the driving motive. ‘*Pyramus and Thisbe*’ introduces romantic love which is a sudden development that irrupts and consumes the lovers. We can laugh at it as a folly or dismiss it as a dream. It is a passing fancy which has little to do with genuine experience of love.

Shakespeare has thus so far only a casual encounter with love. He has either played with it or laughed at it or even ridiculed it; In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare at last dares the great mystery. He chooses what may be called an ‘extreme case’. The hero and heroine are hardly more than boy and girl, and they are children of two warring Veronese families. The city itself is often in the grip of the fever of family feud, street brawls, and civic commotion, The Duke is a feckless person who can only make well-meant speeches. All attendant circumstances--- are against the lovers. Shakespeare took his plot and most of his characters and often even the ideas for the dialogues from Arthur Brooke’s long meandering poem, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562). He might have also seen the prose version in Painter’s *Palace of Pleasure* (1567). Other possible sources French and Italian have been listed by scholars and researchers, but commonsense tells us that, for Shakespeare himself, Brooke’s poem was probably all he needed. The play is rather shorter than the poem, since although they both run to a little over 3000 lines Brooke’s lines are longer than the Shakespearian five-foot iambic lines. The main change is the change from the narrative to the dramatic mode; in other words, the action in the play has swiftness, a precipitancy, which is foreign to the narrative (and, let us add, everyday life). In Brooke, the wooing of Romeus is spread over some weeks, in the play, Juliet is seen wooed, and won the same night. In the poem, the killing of Tybalt takes place several weeks after the secret marriage, in the play, about an hour afterwards. While examining the cause of tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*, Iyengar says that *Romeo and Juliet* is the only Shakespearean tragedy in which the catastrophe has no causal relation with a flaw or vicious mole in either the hero or the heroine. Iyengar says that the critics who have tried to discover ‘moral faults’ or ‘tragic errors’ in *Romeo and Juliet* have only succeeded in reducing the Aristotelian or Bradleyan theory of tragedy to an absurdity.

In the chapter ‘*Great Tragedy*’ Iyengar proceeds to find out Shakespeare’s view on Tragedy. Naturally it is Bradley’s view that comes to his mind. First, he agrees that Bradley



still remains untouched. Iyengar says that Shakespeare has not given the definition of tragedy himself and therefore clues and ciphers will have to be gathered from his tragedies to arrive at his views. Critics have tried to solve all the problems including even the questions of authorship of his plays but they have not tried to locate Shakespeare's answers to the cardinal questions relating to Tragedy. Iyengar here raises four questions which are as follows. First the tragic world, what does it look like? Second the forces that govern the tragic world; third the tragic hero- what kind of person is he? Fourth, what is the final impression that the tragedy leaves upon our mind? The answer to the first question lies in the opening scene of Macbeth where Macbeth says, 'So fair and foul a day, I have not seen'. Co-incidentally Macbeth echoes the words of the witches: fair is foul and foul is fair. The tragic world is thus full of contraries:

It is a sick world, a demented world, a world out of joint; it is a world where purblind men and women 'enact Hell' in their midst and achieve a thwarted purposing, a world where good intentions fatally miscarry.... We are constantly caught between 'is' and 'is not' the natural and the unnatural, the terrestrial and the infernal. (Iyengar 445)

The answer to the second question may be inferred from the conversation that occurs between Antony and Cleopatra in the first scene;

Cleo. If it be love indeed, tell me how much

Ant. There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

Cleo. I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.

Ant. Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth (Vavington 412).

The love between Antony and Cleopatra is beyond all imaginative limits. No bourn can be set to it. It is not only love, veneration, pity but they know ambition, pride, jealousy, misanthropy, etc. which rule in human lives, but they know no limits in Shakespearean tragedy. They, "wax without hindrance, race without check and rage without limit". Their excess constitutes what Masfield calls the "tragic obsession" or we may characterize it as "tragic error" or simply the "tragic trait".

The answer to the question as to what kind of person the tragic hero is may be found in the second scene of Hamlet where the hero says 'a little more than kin' and 'less than kind', The tragic hero is thus like Hamlet who is a little more than kin to us as Hamlet is to Claudius. He is also less than kind i.e. "in the family" natural or "affectionate" He is therefore such with whom we come to identify in course of time. He haunts our mind like Gol-Gumbaz of Bijapur, Iyengar says that when we visit Bijapur it is this great architectural wonder of the world that remains in our mind, everything else evaporates. In Shakespearean tragedy the simple focus is on the hero. Hamlet Othello, Lear and Macbeth cannot escape us nor can we escape them. Other characters fade away like Bijapur's trees and low roofed buildings but the hero looms large like a colossus against the sky.

For answer to the last question as to what is the final impression that tragedy leaves upon us, Iyengar advises us to refer to the first utterance of Othello, 'it is better as it is.' Though tragedy is a painful story in which we witness the suffering of the hero which is out of proportion to his offence yet it gives us a sense of satisfaction. We accept things as they happen. It is a paradox of tragedy that its suffering becomes enjoyable. The nature of Shakespeare's alchemy is such that it transforms a story of defeat into a hymn of triumph. The experience of

tragedy, says Iyengar, is of the order of titiksha, the confrontation, the mastering and the beyonding of all the shocks of existence; it is very different from the everyday feeling of jugupsa, the shrinking away from the unpleasant affairs of life. Great Tragedy therefore does not depress, it only elevates.

Analysing the plot of the play Iyengar says that all the characters in the sub-plot Edmund, Gloucester and Edgar are fully assimilated into the scheme of the main plot and both (the subplot and the main plot) together represent a single graph of the thwarted destinies of fathers and sons. Though expelled by Lear, Kent is almost everywhere. Like Kent the fool also follows Lear like a shadow. While Edgar is Lear's god's son, the fool is Lear's alter-ego, his conscience and his self subjectified and charged with trembling sensibility. The fool is also constant reminder of Cordelia, for his innocent unselfish love of her gives him the prerogative to represent her in her absence. In Shakespeare's time, the same boy played the role of fool and Cordelia. Iyengar comments: By a curious fact of transcendence, the Fool is not only himself but Cordelia's image and Edgar's soul-mate. However, Iyengar observes that more than anything else it is the storm, that is the most important in the play. He says 'The storm is the play, it sucks everything in and leaves it mangled to the surface. There is no escape for any of them. The guilty and the innocent both perish in it. The abnormalities of human relationship synchronize with the aberrations of nature. The storm is in fact both the meaning and the mystery of the tragedy of *King Lear*. Iyengar takes up the question if then the storm is both circumference and centre of *King Lear*, how is the play to be staged It was raised first by Lamb and later on by Bradley. They felt that the play is not fit for the stage. Here Iyengar agrees with Granville Barker and says that we should not look for realistic presentation but rather achieve imaginative identification with Lear and so with his passion and storms. Iyengar says that it is not only the storm that is the problem; *King Lear* has, in fact, other problem too in this regard because the play is conceived by Shakespeare as a play that transcends time and locality. The stage is not our place. It represents our palace, a castle, the open country, a wealth, a hallowed the country near Dover. It is the whole world and also the human heart. Lear is everyman. Other scenes like the blinding of Gloucester are too crude and painful for representation. What is the point of the Dover Cliff Scene? It is not something too farcical, Iyengar asks, but the ultimate reaction is- 'it is better as it is'. *King Lear* is an allegory; it has diverse levels of meaning. At one level, it can be a political study. In the early years of the twentieth century, Miller lectured at Madras that the peril involved in going either too fast or too slow with the transition of power is evident from how tragic it proved for Lear when he hastily transferred power to evil agents Corniwal, Edmund, Goneril and Regan reminding like one of the failure of commonwealth and the lapse of England into moral anarchy and social degradation. Iyengar says that we can appreciate the warning of Miller better today with the misguided Lear like partition of 1947 and after at another level, we can study king as a tragic thesis and the Admirable Crichton by Barrie as the comic anti thesis: At yet another level it can be read as a play that makes out of chaos an incredible harmony. The play, elaborates John F Danby, is the dramatization of the meaning of the word 'Nature'; there is benignant nature v/s malignant nature. Lear against his daughters and Gloucester against his unnatural son. Nature, Reason all are perverted. Providential order is restored after incalculable suffering, which ushers in a

transcendent society- a Utopia, a New Jerusalem. Good exists; love is no stranger to us. There are justiciars above, yet the question remains why Shakespeare evokes so much horror. The real meaning becomes evident when all the horror disappears and love transfigures everything giving strength and wisdom.

The next play that Iyengar undertakes for analysis is *Timon of Athens* which has several parallels with *King Lear*. Both deal with the theme of ingratitude. Comparing Lear and Timon, Iyengar says whereas the extravagances of Lear appear natural, the aberrations of Timon don't seem to be motivated. Timon, in fact, veers, between extremes; He is either too generous or too censorious. His love and hate both are universal. He makes no discrimination. When he hates, he hates all the very shape, semblance of man. The Katharsis that enables King Lear is lacking in Timon. The tragedy of Timon does not transcend his death. Katharsis if any, has to be distilled from the last scene of the play.

Iyengar then, proceeds to examine the date of *Timon*. The similarity between *Timon* and *Lear* on the one hand, *Timon* and *Coriolanus* on the other has given rise to enough speculation about its date. Bradley places it after *Lear* and before *Macbeth*. Murry thinks that it was written about the time of sonnets. He says that an earlier date is also possible.

The last problem that Iyengar points out is the authorship of the play. The doubt about its authorship emanates from the lack of structural unity and uneven quoting. The lack of structural unity is explained in terms of a hypothesis that after the success of *King Lear*, Shakespeare undertook *Timon* from Plutarch's *Life of Antony* which gave Shakespeare the germinating idea of the misanthrope. His *life of Alcibiades* was the other source. Shakespeare perhaps wrote the IV Act first and made out a rough sketch of the rest of the plays when his sudden involvement with *Macbeth* gave him no time to ever revert to it again

In the next section, Iyengar discusses *Macbeth* and he says that of the four great tragedies, *Hamlet* is the most universal, *Othello* the most poignant and *Lear* the most cosmic. *Macbeth* is the shortest, yet the most awe inspiring. It is essentially most tragic of the quartet, as the issue between good and evil is nowhere as sharply treated as here. It is what Wilson Knight calls the 'Apocalypse of Evil'. It is distinguished by its simplicity, by grandeur in simplicity. *Macbeth* is the most dominant character. The play deals chiefly with his crime and its consequences. More than physical action, it is in fact the condition of Macbeth's mind that constitutes the real centre of interest in the play. Macbeth, says Iyengar, is a representative human being. He has unchecked will and as he has already a predisposition to evil, he does evil rather than good. This pushes him over the abyss and he becomes a tragic hero in excelsis.

Discussing the sources of *Macbeth*, Iyengar says that the story has been taken from Holinshed, but changes have been made by Shakespeare. Shakespeare might have also relied on William Stewart's poem '*Bulk of the Chroniclis of Scotland*'. About Lady Macbeth, Iyengar says that her character is utterly subservient to Macbeth. Her complicity in the crime was because of her husband. Banquo's character in the play is like an accessory. *Macbeth* alone is responsible for his crime. After the murder of King Duncan, he begins to live at two levels of consciousness- the surface man and the inner man. From the beginning to the IV scene of Act III, Macbeth, says Iyengar "is a single gigantic wave of psychic energy achieving glorious poetic transmutation: We are carried along- the current of Shakespeare's passion and poetry



carries us along, and there is no parallel for this anywhere even in Shakespearean tragedy” (Iyengar 515).

Discussing *Antony and Cleopatra*, Iyengar observes that it is not just a sequel to *Julius Caesar*. The Antony that we see in *Julius Caesar* is different from the Antony that we meet in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Just as *Hamlet* who had charmed Ophelia elsewhere as scholar, courtier and soldier after the death of his earlier self, in the same way Antony is also a changed man, when Shakespeare represents him again after a gap of eight years. Iyengar compares *Antony and Cleopatra* with *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. What divides *Romeo and Juliet* is not any tragic flaw but the feud between their families. The love between *Othello* and *Desdemona*, defies any reason. The conduct of *Desdemona* is difficult to understand except in terms of willfulness and perverting the earlier *Cleopatra* is a password for lust and duplicity. If she is a slut, she is also the loyal mistress who follows her Antony in death. She is a harlot, a queen and a martyr all in one. The three physiognomies are irreconcilable. If the character of *Cleopatra* is puzzling, no less puzzling is the character of Antony. His greatness as a Roman soldier is at stake. He is generous and brave. Lepidus, Caesar and *Cleopatra* all pay tributes to him. But sometimes when he is not Antony, he comes short of that great property which should always be with him.

About its sources; Iyengar says that Plutarch’s *Life of Antony* was the main source on which Shakespeare relied. The play *Cleopatra* by Samuel Daniel and Appian’s *History and Chronicles of the Roman Wars* also came in handy. Through the character of Antony, Shakespeare shows conflict between honour and love. His decision to marry Octavia says Iyengar, was not a mere act of policy, but an effort of will to break off from the enchantress *Cleopatra*. But so complete was the spell of *Cleopatra* on him that with her beside him, he lost his judgment. This theme is attempted again by Dryden in his *All for Love*, but “whereas Dryden treats it logically with but a touch of poetry here and there, Shakespeare dares to reverse the accepted priorities by giving his hero and heroine dimensions other than those of worldly wisdom, cool calculation or moral correctitude” (Iyengar 535) *Antony and Cleopatra* is a problem play because we are ill at ease to approach it intellectually. Should we condemn or applaud the lovers? Or should we suspend our judgment which in any case is not possible by the intoxication of the poetry? Is the play the tragedy of the lovers or their supreme triumph concluding the discussion Iyengar says “while it is true that neither Antony nor *Cleopatra* has finally let humankind down it is no less true that the price of their victory is their tragic self-immolation? To escape the judgment here’ they have had to leap across morality. The courage of their taking off constitutes their glory, while necessity to make the leap defies their limitation” (Iyengar 536). *Coriolanus* is the last of Shakespeare’s tragedies. It is, however so puzzling that one is apt to treat it as a problem play. It is difficult to ascertain as to what is *Coriolanus*’ flaw. Is it pride as the two tribunes Sicinius and Brutus think? Or is it an excessive regard for the patrician class and a like contempt for the plebeians? Is it an inordinate hankering after honour? It is also difficult to understand personal rivalry between *Coriolanus* and Aufidius. *Coriolanus*, says Iyengar is like *Lear* who but slandering knows himself and his noble qualities. He lacks the poise of reason and humanity because of his upbringing. His mother *Volumnia* is largely responsible for the imbalance in his deportment. In poetry it cannot

overmatch Macbeth and Antony and Cleopatra. The hero dominates the play even more than the prince of Denmark dominates Hamlet. It is not a political play, though war and politics constitute its background. The destiny of Coriolanus is the theme of the play, but we hardly get intimate with Coriolanus as we do with a *Hamlet* or *Lear* or *Antony*. Iyengar compares the fate of Coriolanus with that of *Timon* and Alcibiades who become victims of collective ingratitude like him. When he is banished by his own people, he goes to Actium and asks Aufidius to kill him as he had been spited by the very people he saved. But Aufidius welcomes him and they ally to invade Rome when Coriolanus turns down the request of his friends not to attack his own country, it is his mother who prevails upon him and a treaty is concluded. But when he returns to Antium, he is killed by the conspirators of Aufidius for betrayal. Shakespeare does not take sides in developing the conflict. Patrician, Demagogue, soldier citizen all are subject to pitiless probe. "If a king or consul is endowed with power, but power without grace, he no doubt becomes a potent danger to the commonalty. But if a whole multitude is collectively endowed with power and are collectively incapable of grace, their rule can be a hideous nightmare" (Iyengar 547). The Volscians and Romans change towards Coriolanus to serve their interest but Coriolanus changes because his heart is touched with grace. "Coriolanus dies because there is no place in the world for him- no place either at Rome or at Actium. The past is too bitter to be blotted out. The future is too ambiguous. In death only can he wholly rehabilitate himself. Only in Death's Other Kingdom can he find the peace that this sullied earth has denied him. More sinned against than sinning, maddened than mad, dead Coriolanus is assured of a noble memory in the glowing pages of Shakespeare" (Iyengar 548). As is evident from the foregoing discussion, Iyengar has dealt with Shakespearian Tragedy in three separate chapters – *Early Tragedy*, *Great Tragedy* and *Later Tragedy*. The discussion is fairly exhaustive. In *Early Tragedy*, he points out the shaping influences on Shakespeare. The earlier attempts are imitations, but very soon his art matures and he becomes the greatest dramatist of his age. In his discussion, Iyengar proceeds strictly according to his plan i. e. explores the background discusses the sources and examines the plays in their chronological order. Wherever there is controversy, he tries to resolve it convincingly. Though in the preface he makes a modest claim as regards his studies but the fact is he has read extensively. The list of critics quoted by him on Tragedy alone exceeds seventy-five. Some of the major critics include C. E. Vaughan, Frederick Harrison, A.P. Rossiter, Percy Simpson, Tillyard, Middleton Murry, L. C. Knights, Peter Alexander, E.E. Stoll, Christopher Noth, Wyndhar Lewis, H.B. Charlton, Allandyce Nicoll, J.E. Crafts and others. Again, as per his claim, Iyengar gives parallels from Indian life and literature, which gives a new dimension to his criticism. He, for example, compares the feud between Hindus and Muslims which engineered communal holocausts at the partition of India. When Romeo is openly challenged by Tybalt, he desires to be friends with Tybalt, whereupon Iyengar compares Romeo with Ashok Vardhan the only General who bravely sounded the retreat from revenge and hate. He says our experience with Shakespeare's tragic hero is like that of Gol Gumbaz. When we return from Bijapur all monuments are blotted out but gol Gumbaz lingers in the memory. He compares Othello with Kalidasa's *Abijnana Sakuntalam*. He says that the tragedy of the lost ring, having found each other at Kanva's hermitage and lost each other at the court, the lovers—Sakuntala and Dushyanta—meet again,

years later at that other hermitage, Marich as, now to be united forever. So too, in Othello, the tragedy of the lost handkerchief, having found each other at Venice and lost each other at Cyprus, the lovers—Desdemona and Othello—pass out affirming undying love with their dying breath, to be reunited forever in Death's dream- kingdom. He defines tragedy in terms of Valmiki's expression 'amritam vishasamsristam', i.e. poison mixed with nectar. King Lear divides his kingdom but alas! He does not realize that there is grim irony at the heart of human calculation. In the *Ramayan*, King Dashratha plans to install Ram as the Yuvaraja. But the day of coronation proves to be the day of banishment for Rama. He further compares the personal rivalry between Coriolanus and Aufidius with that between Karna and Arjuna or Duryodhana and Bhima in the Mahabharat. Coriolanus was great and that is what makes him impossible, like Mahatma Gandhi. When Coriolanus rushed alone into Corioli, he might have been overpowered and killed like Abhimanyu. He likens the Valumina—Coriolanus scene with the great scene in the Mahabharata where Kunti pleads with Karna to stay his hands against Pandavas. He quotes Beryl Pogson who presents an esoteric interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. A few lines may be pertinent. Man is in the making and the completed man is both Purush the male and Prakriti the female. Having fallen away from bliss, man seeks to recover the lost heritage. The power of Good and Evil fight their battle on the Kurukshetra that is the soul.... The chapter is also significant because Iyengar defines Shakespearean tragedy in his own way by raising four questions from the plays and giving their answers from the same.

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