ABSTRACT

This dissertation has studied some of the ways in which Shakespeare presented his villains as tragic figures. It studies the idea of the tragic in Shakespeare's dramas, and has tried to identify and define the techniques and strategies that Shakespeare used to create a tragic effect. It establishes that tragedy concerns itself with the audience response, and Shakespeare used certain techniques and formal structures to achieve some particular fulfillments in the theatre house. This research starts out with a discussion of the origin and development of the idea of the tragic and studies the ways the idea of the tragic can be applied to villains.

I have studied two texts from the four genres of Shakespeare's dramas to study the idea of the tragic as applicable to villains. I have isolated the techniques Shakespeare used to gain audience sympathy for the villains and so I have established how Shakespeare treats his evil-doers as tragic characters. I have shown that Elizabethan dramatists did not have an air-tight concept of tragedy and did not practice their art in similar ways. They had only a certain notion of the elements, and so its is debatable if they wrote their plays from a certain preconceived idea of a generic form called tragedy.

However, Elizabethan audience expected a tragedy to be a drama of thrilling events involving very striking and impressive persons, whose lives would be dominated by a certain human characteristic or action, which pushed the events to a certain inevitable consequence and so a sorrowful ending.

My research shows that dramas which showed sorrowful situations happening to bad characters emphasised retribution, but also appealed to audience's loose sympathies centred on a rebellious attitude, which was the product of the Renaissance. The remorse of a sinner who happened to be good was a Renaissance idea, which soon evolved into the idea of a just rebel who was forced by the evil deeds of those who controlled the society. This research shows that Shakespeare followed not Seneca but rather the Greek models like Medea or Antigone to present idea of the antagonist as a principal character of the drama showing his protagonists up against antagonists who then dominated the action and became the cause of the catastrophe. I have shown that Shakespeare presented the antagonists as human figures capable of pathos and tragedy.

My research has established that Shakespeare gave psychological depth to the antagonists through the use of soliloquy. He gave to the antagonists expressive poetic passages. With Shakespeare villainous characters began to possess a psychological profile and the 'plot' came to have a greater part devoted to the antagonist. The antagonist thus became a character study in his own right. Shakespeare saw the tragic flaw of the protagonist manifested in its most ugly form in the antagonist thus making his plays psychological studies in human struggle against evil which was socio-political and psychological. The hallmark of this struggle became the anagnorisis, the stage of recognition of the ugliness of one's soul, which caused the audience sympathy to flow in the direction of the antagonist. It was thus that the evildoer, the condemned of the society, became a tragic character.