

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TRAGIC CHARACTERS DRAWN BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND HENRIK IBSEN

莎士比亞與易卜生悲劇人物之比較

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I. Introduction

Tragedy is serious drama in which we often see conflicts leading to the death or great catastrophe of the hero. In the modern stage, tragedy has branched out into social, naturalistic and psychological dramas and we are still able to identify certain characters of these dramas as tragic.

The present analysis does not aim at a comparative study of all the tragic characters drawn by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Henrik Ibsen (1828-

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Chart Below Shows Contrast of the Principal Tragic Characters Drawn by the Two Playwrights

SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616)	IBSEN (1828-1906)
HAMLET (the hero of <i>Hamlet</i>)	SKULE (the principal character of <i>The Pretenders</i>)
LADY MACBETH (the heroine in <i>Macbeth</i>)	ROSMER (the principal character in <i>Rosmersholm</i>)
IAGO (the villain in <i>Othello</i>)	REBECCA (the principal woman character in <i>Rosmersholm</i>)
OTHELLO (the hero of <i>Othello</i>)	GREGERS WERLE (the principal character of <i>Wild Duck</i>)
KING LEAR (the hero of <i>King Lear</i>)	HIALMER HKDAL (a man character in <i>Wild Duck</i>)
MARCUS BRUTUS (a hero in <i>Julius Caesar</i>)	SOLNESS (the principal character of <i>The Masterbuilder</i>)
DESDEMONA (the heroine of <i>Othello</i>)	BRAND (the principal character in <i>Brand</i>)
JULIET (the heroine of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>)	HEDDA GABLER (the principal woman character in <i>Hedda Gabler</i>)
OPHELIA (a woman character in <i>Hamlet</i>)	NORA (the principal woman character of <i>A Doll's House</i>)

1906). It is limited to a select few which can be compared with one another and with which the writer has a particular familiarity.

To begin with, a few important things must be said about the two playwrights. In addition to their reputation of being great artists, they are, in effect, two colossus landmarks in the progress of human mind—not in the sense they are great thinkers profound in abstract ideas, but in the sense they are the best investigators of human behavior as well as its complicated mental processes. It's true that Shakespeare derived the sources of many of his characters from such predecessors as Holinshed, Cinthio, Saxo Grammaticus, Boccaccio and Plutarch, but he has writhed and weaved them in such a way that they have practically become creations of his own,¹ inspired by the spirit of Shakespeare's own age rather than a cultural heritage from the ancients. This is why Ben Jonson praised him as 'the Soule of the Age.'

On the other hand, the source material of an Ibsen's play have always been traced to his own life story² which has illuminated most of his characters. This same effort has also been made along the study of Shakespeare for the past two centuries without much effect because of the scantiness of his biographical data.³ Both Shakespeare and Ibsen are similarly thoughtful and sensitive personalities. And too often they fetched their characters from their own mind rather than from the observation of life.⁴ According to a study made by Harold McCurdy,⁵ Shakespeare's principal characters, like those of many other writers, represent the behavioral possibilities of the author. If this is taken for granted, then we may say that if Shakespeare is Hamlet, he is also Claudius; if he lurks somewhere in the heart of Othello, so likewise he lurks somewhere in the brain of Iago.

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1. The traditional Hamlet possibly including that of the lost play written by Kyd is a man of action instead of a man of contemplation; in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare departed from his source by weaving an earlier chapter of Holinshed's *Chronicle* into the play, sketched Lady Macbeth with a few strong touches and invented the ghastly sleep-walking scene, all of which shows how freely Shakespeare has dealt with the sources.
 2. This is true of all Ibsen's psychological and social plays. In one of his letters, he wrote, "One must have something to create from, some life experience. The author who has not that does not create; he only writes books."
 3. The authentic knowledge of Shakespeare's life could be given in no more than a couple of pages.
 4. Charles Lamb said of Shakespeare: He fetched his characters from his own mind, not from what is called the observation of life.
 5. *The Personality of Shakespeare*. Harold Grier McCurdy. Yale Univ. Press 1953.

Personally, Shakespeare is a conservative and most likely a loose-liver⁶ as compared with Ibsen who is an iconoclast but strict moralist. As in the case of many great artists and thinkers, sometimes their minds seem to be affected with a slight degree of morbidity. The one is clouded with deep sorrows during his mature stage while the other is always haunted by his doubts and sickly conscience.⁷ For their backgrounds, the two epochs saw almost equally radical changes in human society, and, in each, romanticism was giving way to realism, which, while still in the primary stage of its development during the Elizabethan period, has grown full-fledged in the last century. Compared with each other, Ibsen is primarily a realist who makes the everyday life of Europe's bourgeoisie the subject-matter of his drama while Shakespeare is far more romantic and lyrical than the Norwegian dramatist; and, it is indeed something quite significant how the towering heroes of Shakespeare's drama dwindled in the modern plays of Ibsen as kings and nobles gave way to the middle class of Europe.

2. A Comparative Study of Shakespeare's Hamlet with Ibsen's King Skule and Pastor Rosmer

Shakespeare's Hamlet is a well-known dramatic character which has been discussed by voluminous writings of two centuries.⁸ Not so with Ibsen's King Skule, neither with his Rosmer. King Skule, the principal character of *The Pretenders*, the last play written during Ibsen's early period of romanticism, suffers a gnawing doubt about his natural right to the throne throughout his intense struggle for power with Hakon, who as a grandson of Norway's Great King Sverre has, therefore, lawful claim to the sovereignty. Like Hamlet, Skule is over-discreet⁹ and slow in action. Compare what Bishop Nicholas said of him with the solilo-

6. This hypothesis is based upon the following data: 1. his hasty marriage and later long absence from his Stratford home; 2. the sometimes jesting and filthy speeches of his dramas; 3. his love affairs with Miss Mary Fitton while in London; 4. his intimacy with Christopher Marlowe and other Mermaid Tavern poets.

7. Shakespeare's Hamlet, King Lear, Timon and Othello like Ibsen's Solness, Brand and John Gabriel Borkman are, more or less, morbid characters. And there are reasons to suppose the principal characters of Shakespeare, like those of Henrik Ibsen, are somewhat characteristic of the author. (CF. McCurdy's *The Personality of Shakespeare*)

8. Little attention was attached to Shakespeare's plays during the Restoration period.

9. On several occasions it would be easier for Skule to take over the kingdom, but he delays it until when it seems the least likely.

guy of Hamlet, the one sounds as if echoes to the other.

Hamlet...

Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event,—
A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward,—I do not know
Why yet I live to say, "This thing's to do,"
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do 't...

—Hamlet, Act 4, Sc. 4—

Bishop Nicholas (to Skule)

....Aye, there is the rub, Earl—that is the curse which has lain upon
your life. You would fain know every way open at need,—you dare not
break all your bridges and keep only one...You lay snare for your foe,
and set traps for his feet and hang sharp swords over his head; you strew
poison in every dish and you spread hundred nets for him. But when
he walks into your toil you dare not draw your string; if he stretches
out his hand for the poison, you think it safer that he should fall by the
sword; if he is like to be caught in the morning, you think it wiser to
wait till eventide.

—The Pretenders, Act 2—

Like Hamlet, Skule also murmurs uselessly about his own weaknesses.

I am sick, I am sick!—
Wherefore should not
the right on my side!

—The Pretenders, Act 4—

And again like Hamlet,¹⁰ he needs proof to support his cause. He inquires
the Bishop endlessly about the letter which bears the secret of Hakon's birth and
therefore the key to his kingly right. But the Bishop, out of selfish purposes,
deliberately burns the letter in order to maintain the rivalry between the two

10. *Hamlet*, Act 2, Sc. 2.

The spirit I have seen may be the devil,

.....

I will have grounds more relative than this

parties. And this makes him forever subject to the slavery of a gnawing doubt—a doubt which opens all the bridges to his enemy and prepares himself for defeat—

And deep rooted as is Hakon's
confidence so deep rooted is my doubt
What man on earth can weed it out?

—The Pretenders, Act 3—

King Skule is, therefore, probably a dramatic character modelled upon Shakespeare's Hamlet.¹¹ But Ibsen has cast away the orthodox character of Prince Hamlet in favor of a nihilistic King Skule as the hero of the play, and made the strife for kingdom vice versa.¹² Unlike that of Hamlet in whom practically all literary men are able to see their own projected image because the qualities of Hamlet—too much thinking and too little action—are so much akin to their own characteristics, the tragedy of King Skule is chiefly a tragedy of doubt which is a personal characteristic of the Norwegian playwright.

From a mechanic point of view, however, neither Hamlet nor Skule are able to do better with their limited personal qualities under their perscribed conditions. By the some token, modern psychology seems to justify their tragic destiny on its principle that every human being is adjusted to his environments the best he can. Now we talk of these dramatic characters as if they were real people about us. For the explanation of their mystery, we need not appeal to such prepossessed theories¹³ like those of Coleridge and Schlegel, many of which are plausible only when applied to certain particular instances in our life. Under ordinary conditions, our thoughts can not so prevail over our sense as to make us forget the necessity of action unless external difficulties, perceived either consciously or unconsciously as invincible, exist.¹⁴ By this token, we may explain both Hamlet's and Skule's difficulties in action as resulted from difficulties perceived unconsciously by them as invincible. And from this point of view it is not their own doubts

11. During Ibsen's visit to Copenhagen and Dresden in 1852, he the performances of *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Richard III*, of which he must have retained a vivid memory when he came to write *The Pretenders*.

12. In *Hamlet* the nephew opposes the uncle; in *The Pretenders*, it is the uncle who opposes his nephew.

13. I use the word 'prepossessed' because Coleridge's theory of Hamlet is characteristic of his own melancholiness. Coleridge's remarkable commentation upon Hamlet's character: Man differs from the brute in so far as thoughts prevails over sense, but if he meditates to excess he may lose power to act.

14. According to modern psychologists, part of the stimuli from without may be conducted into our organism unperceived by us. Nevertheless, they may act upon our body and mind just as well.

and scrupulous thinkings that benumb their imperative actions, but rather the unconscious perception of the strong opposite force as invincible that gives rise to such negative activities on their mind.¹⁵

The time is out of joint;—O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!—

—Hamlet, Act 1, Sc. V—

From the very beginning Hamlet was diffident about his own ability to carry out the mission because already he had been dimly aware that his enemies were too strong for him. Werle, one of the critics of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, was partly right when he says that Hamlet's difficulties are external, yet he did not explain to us why Hamlet as well as Skule abuses himself so much for his own inaction now that the difficulties are external—

Why what an ass am I!
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,

.....

Must like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall acursing, like a very crab,
A scullion!

Fie upon 't foh! About, my brain!

—Hamlet, Act 2, Sc. 2—

The prince is, so to speak, caught between the devil and the blue sea. Consciously he has his duty to avenge his father yet unconsciously he is hardnessed to the valves of his safety instinct. This is why he finds himself mysteriously averse to his retributive actions.

Another character of Ibsen's drama offering a good contrast with Hamlet is Pastor Rosmer, the principle man character in *Rosmersholm*. Rosmer is a noble and high-strung character like Hamlet, who feels such a compunction over the death of his wife Beata that he dares not venture across a foot-bridge over a stream into which she has thrown herself. In contrast with King Skule, Rosmer directs his gnawing doubt against himself. Like Hamlet, he wavers easily in his struggle to win a cause. And finally we find him torn apart by the opposing

15. This is inferred from the philosophy of the great American thinker John Dewey who maintains that our thoughts are stirred up by the obstacles we have met in the course of life. Hamlet's soliloquy that he has "the cause and will and strength and means to do 't'" is only a kind of reasoning, which may not correspond with the grim facts.

forces of two political camps during the heat of their battle. His end is as tragic as that of Hamlet, yet more sublimated.¹⁶

It must be noted, however, that in Ibsen's dramas the inner conflicts of Rosmer and Skule are vividly contrasted with the clashes of external forces. Yet the difficult situation of Hamlet is only dimly suggested by Shakespeare.¹⁷ Hence, as dramatic character, Hamlet is more than a success. But in terms of accurate portrayal of life, Ibsen seems to know more by making the inner conflicts correlated with the outer turmoils.

3. Rebecca as Contrasted With Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is compared with Rebecca in that both of them are involved in horrible crimes and deadly sins,¹⁸ and that both of them end their life tragically. An ambitious, dominant and iron-hearted noble woman, Lady Macbeth is both an instigator and co-operator in the murder of King Duncan—

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlement.
Come, you spirits that tend
On mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from crown to
The toe top full
Of direst cruelty!

—Macbeth, Act 1, Sc. 5—

Throughout the plot, Shakespeare makes her crime so apparent that it is not difficult for us to imagine how she smears Duncan's fresh blood upon his bodyguards when her husband shrinks back from the horrible sight of murder. Yet the alleged crime committed by Ibsen's Rebecca is purely a question of psy-

16. When Pastor Rosmer ended his life with his second wife Rebecca by jumping together into the river, he clinged fast to his emancipated view of life: There is no judge over us; and therefore we must do justice upon ourselves—these are saintly words.

17. Shakespeare never mentions how the King is fortified against Hamlet (he probably has no need to, since a king is usually fortified at all times and in all places). Cholerie readers may think that the King can be easily dispatched as in the prayer scene. But the question is what will become of Hamlet after he has dispatched the King? Will not the whole court accuse him of murdering and insanity?

18. Rebecca's lust for love and possession is one of the seven deadly sins.

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chology.¹⁹ One needs only to read twice over this play and one may discover that there isn't enough evidence to prove her guilty of the accidental death of Rosmer's former wife.²⁰ Her own confession that it was she who had led Rosmer's wife to the paths of delusion would be convincing if it had not been done out of her love for Rosmer whom she saw as a victim of his sickly conscience over the incident. Moreover, it is a question highly significant to us whether there is such a human being whose magic power can bewitch others into the path of delusions. Yet, on the other hand, martyrdom could not be the only motive behind so violent self-accusations which sound too spontaneous to be simply fabrications. Is it that Rebecca is the real serpent who is more terrible than Lady Macbeth in her slyness of assuming a sheep's skin since the beginning, or that, in the last two acts of the play, she is so broken under the pressure of adverse circumstances that it is she herself who is actually suffering from delusions?²¹

In answer to this question, we'll have to seek help from the general knowledge of psychology. On the one hand, we know through our daily experience that aggressive motivations may be very different from aggressive actions. Being low in spirit and a miserable scapegoat of all evils, Rebecca seems to mistake her moral compunction over her aggressive motivations as concrete persecutions against poor Beata. On the other hand, nevertheless, we must remember that human consciousness is highly variable,²² and many of the very unpleasant experiences are often suppressed from our awareness when our mind and will are strong enough for them. Hence towards the end of Act II, we still hear Rebecca's innocent remarks, "Oh, why should we care what all those people think. We know in our own heart that we are blameless." She lies not when she says this. But as in the case of Lady Macbeth who, though strongest at the beginning, succumbs into a ghastly sleep-walker washing futilely the blood stains off her hands on the eve of the approaching of the avenging troops;²³ in a likewise manner, Rebecca must

19. The argument is presented in the following pages.

20. It is a very bold assumption that Rebecca had driven Rosmer's former wife Beata to throw herself into the millrace by insinuating to her that she (Rebecca) was going to have a child by Rosmer. Cf. *Rosmersholm*, Act III.

21. She came to Rosmersholm with a view to winning Pastor Rosmer to the cause of the liberal movement. Yet, at last, she discovered that the conservative elements represented by Rosmer's ancestry and Mr. Kroll were so strong that she was ultimately mired in the place.

22. In our vast streams of consciousness, our perception at the moment is only a moving spotlight on the immense stage of our spiritual world.

23. Here Shakespeare incidentally describes how the inner conflicts correspond with the outer.

have gradually revealed to herself, after she was broken down by the hopelessness of her cause, how during Beata's lifetime she had now and then thought of getting rid of her—

...there are two sorts of will in us I believe! I wanted Beata away by one means or another. Yet I never really believe it would come to pass. As I felt my way forward, at each step I ventured, I seemed to hear something within me cry out. No farther! And yet I could not stop. I had to venture the least bit farther....

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She was at that time suffering a severe conflict of mind, a conflict, we may say, between the id and the superego.²⁴ She had decided to go, yet that, as she explained later to herself, only served as a kind of gesture, the thing of which can be well compared to the story of a young lady who struggles hard to wrestle herself away from the embrace of her man, only to find her own arms in broader contact with his body. As an unmarried woman, she was not able to free from her biogenic instincts, which seized upon her like a storm on the sea. And when two women are in love with a man, is it not natural that one of them should give way? Not that the one persecutes the other, but that they are naturally so incompatible with each other—

Rebecca: It was a wild passion.
it came upon me like a storm on
the sea...It seizes you and
whirl you along—There is no
resisting it.

Rosmer: And so it swept the unhappy Beata
into the mill-race.

—Rosmersholm, Act 4—

Rebecca appeals to our sympathy much more than Lady Macbeth since she is primarily a sinner of the heart, subject to the blind forces of nature over which she herself had no control. Compare Lady Macbeth's arrogance and blood-thirstiness with Rebecca's humility and loving-kindness towards the distressed people, we are all the more in defense of the latter.

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24. Cf. Sigmund Freud's analysis of the mind.

4. Iago vs. Gregers Werle

The characterization of Iago and Gregers Werle in *Othello* and *Wild Duck* represents a very different evaluation in the ethical problems of good and evil.²⁵ Shakespeare's Iago is a typical villain of the traditional type, yet the role of Gregers Werle, another satan with the camouflage of an honest man, is a particularly new creation. Both Iago and Gregers Werle are real people belonging to two different ages.²⁶ There was certainly no Mr Gregers Werle in Shakespeare's time since truth-seeking was not a word for his age. On the other hand, Shakespeare's Iago has ceased to exist today because modern people are likely to be more rational.²⁷ Intellectually, both Iago and Gregers are superior to ordinary men. Yet their intellect is somewhat diseased and out of proportion. The intellectual disease of Iago is his amazing capability of disintegrity while Gregers's disease is just of an opposite kind—he is suffering from 'an acute attack of integrity' as Dr. Relling (another character in *The Wild Duck*) appropriately speaks of him. Both Iago and Gregers are extreme egoists, callous yet sensitive, who follow their own will without least regard for others. As your closest friends, they bring your mishaps and ruins even without your slightest suspicion.

Unlike Iago, Ibsen's Gregers Werle cherishes no ill will towards his good friend, Hjalmar Ekdal. Instead he has such a good intention for him that he regards it as his moral duty to lay a true foundation for his marriage in order to redeem the wrong done to his family by older Werle.²⁸ Yet he is able to turn out such a mess of things.²⁹ Is it that human destiny is such that our efforts of doing good are simply to be returned with catastrophic results or that the so-called life illusions³⁰ are so indispensable to man that they completely defy the pursuit

25. The evils of Iago stem from his hatred and malignity; on the other hand, the disastrous havoc introduced by Gregers Werle is carried out through his friendliness and good-will.

26. Iago was real. In the days of Roman Empire, people were likely to attach more importance to military rank than today. When injustice was thought of, hatred was intense since promotion and demotion were a matter of personal judgment rather than governed by laws and system as they are now.

27. Modern people are too sceptic for such follies as is described in *Othello*. They are more or less scientifically-minded.

28. Fourteen years before, Gregers's father had secretly paid off his house maid Gina and married her to Hjalmar in order to avoid a scandal.

29. Gregers' meddlesomeness has resulted in a family quarrel and the suicidal death of Hjalmar's little daughter Hedvig, whom he believed to be an illegitimate child of older Werle.

30. Hjalmar's happy family life is, in fact, founded upon a life-lie which is anyhow necessary to him.

of truth that is implied by the author? Or is it more probably that in this unique creation of Gregers Werle, we are expected by the author to probe deeper into the real motive of those who consciously strive to benefit others while unconsciously harbor some very different ends of theirs?

In his famous commentation upon Iago, Willam Hazlitt says, "In depicting Iago, Shakespeare shows himself as good a philosopher as poet because he knew that love of power, which is another name for love of mischief is natural to man. Iago unites diseased intellectual activity and perfect moral indifference... He stabs man in the dark to prevent ennui." In these remarks, Hazlitt seems to concur with Coleridge view of Iago's 'motiveless malignity', but many of his words here may be applied justifiably to Mr. Gregers Werle rather than to Iago. The man who likes to stab other man in the dark in order to prevent ennui is a most proper epithet for Gregers. For, as we shall presently see, there are at least two motives behind Iago's treachery. To say that Iago is simply a lover of mischief is to do him injustice. But this Gregers Werle, this idle talker and n'er-do-well, notorious for his meddlesomeness in the affairs of other people, after a quarrel with his father and being in a state of extreme ennui, deserts his own house and makes use of the humble home of his good friend as the battlefield where he is to engage with his father in a pitch of war. And the casualties he left behind were a broken home of another man and the life of an innocent child. His last excuse of being the thirteenth at the table is no acquittal of his crime committed only preconsciously.³¹

It is noteworthy that throughout the play, Mr. Gregers Werle is strangely blind to the happiness of Hialmar's family life. He never weighs what effects his revelation of the 'truth' may have upon Hialmar's family. If he cares for true marriage, he should have likewise cared for the true marriage between older Werle and Mrs. Sorby. Yet he disapproves all about this. He sees only his own will and is interested in the most audacious experiment upon the sacred bonds of human life. And sure enough, before any new experiment turns out to be a success, hundreds of trials will be necessary. And among these ridiculous trials of Werle's, Hialmar's family has the honor to be one. Now does not all this account for his love of power which Hazlitt has said of Iago?

Samuel Johnson once gave this shrew remark: "Hell is paved with good intentions." Not only that good intentions are often mere good 'intentions', but that too often they are used, rather conveniently, to encroach upon the un-

31. The word 'preconsciously' is used rather liberally here, not restricted to its technical definition.

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infringeable dominion of others.³² By comparison, Gregers Werle is a more fiendish character than Iago because he is able to be destructive to others even without his own knowledge whereas, from beginning to end, Iago was fully aware of his malicious will against Othello for which he was able to give us his justifications as follows:-

Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place,

...

But he, as loving his own pride and purpose,
Evades them with a bombast circumstance . . .

— Othello, Act 1, Sc. 1 —

For one thing he was not promoted to the lieutenantancy which he had coveted so long. For another, he was gnawingly suspicious that Othello had cuckolded him since twice we hear him say.

I hate the Moore;
And it is thought abroad that
'twixt my sheets
He has done my office.

— Othello, Act 1, Sc. 3 —

And again in Act II, he murmured —
For I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap into my seat
Doth like a poison mineral
Gnaw my inwards;

Such reasons for taking revenge are surely not enough for average man, but they are more than enough for Iago whose sensitivity and inferiority feelings were so acute that he even could not bear to see the beauty of Cassio's life³³ —

32. When people are in a state of needing help, they are also susceptible to injuries.

33. It may be well-established that aggressive action result only from frustration. Yet the intensity of frustration may be perceived differently from one man to another. The traumatic experience that Iago has undergone with Othello is tolerable to ordinary people; but to Iago, it is unbearable. It is too bold to say that his justifications for revenge are mere excuses to his 'motiveless malignity'; it is probable that, according to Shakespeare, his second justification that Othello has cuckolded him is only an illusion, metamorphosed from the first one which is more or less based upon facts.

He hath a daily beauty in his life
Which makes me ugly

Unlike the lofty Gregers Werls who is finally 'confused' at his 'miraculous' destiny of being the thirteenth at the table, the ignoble Iago would probably remain a mischief doer only, if he had not been led on by the even more suspicious nature of Othello who was at last too ready to believe in the infidelity of his wife.

Iago Lie—
Othello with her?
Iago With her, on her;
 What you will.

— Othello, Act 4, Sc. 1 —

Iago might be understood to say that Cassio was lying, thus preparing a way to draw back, or else he might be using a pun here into whose snare however, Othello voluntarily plunged headstrong. So it was Othello's extraordinary suspicious nature that helps to bring forth the tragedy.

5. Other Significant Characters

There is also some similiarity in the construction of *Wild Duck* and *Othello*. The tragedy of both are caused by a strong suspicion and jealousy in regard to family life. No matter how different the stories may be, yet the psychology behind them are all the same—fear commingled with anger resulted from extreme inferiority complex.³⁴ Hialmar Ekdal repulses his little daughter Hedvig not so much because he has discovered that she is not a child of his own as because he is in the fear of losing her. His anger towards her rather serves as a defense to his gnawing consciousness that, sooner or later, Older Werle is going to snatch this child from him, and already the inferiority feelings about his status quo has estranged him from his beloved. Like Shakespeare who artfully placed a handsome Cassio between the black Moore and his beautiful wife, Ibsen increases the effect of his drama by using a rich 'patron'.³⁵ standing between the poor photographer

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34. The inferiority complex of Othello is the color of his skin; with Hialmar, it is his poverty.

35. On Hedvig's birthday, older Werle has promised through a letter to her that Hialmar's father may henceforth draw on his office a hundred crowns a month, and this pecuniary donation is later to pass on to the little girl.

and his beloved little daughter. Hence the results are only too shocking.

Another contrast can be made between the choleric King Lear and the soul-sick masterbuilder Solness³⁶ in the way that as two aging people of great power and success they are prone to flattery and obstinacy. The result is pathetic for the one and disastrous for the other.

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, We find another tragic character of paramount interest — Marcus Brutus. A moral perfection, Brutus lived a virtuous life, and carried out in action the precepts of his philosophical guides with unswerving constancy. Unlike the other conspirators, he stabbed Caesar without a selfish purpose. No one but Ibsen's Brand can be compared with him in regard to their strict self-discipline, unusual courage and sublime purpose. Like Brutus, Brand's rational coldness and inflexibility of will share the fate of many other reformers.³⁷ Yet between Brand and Brutus, there is this difference—Brutus as a man of noble nature is contented when he has set wrong to right; Brand, being an idealist, wants to try out through self-sacrifice what is right and what is wrong. Compared with Brutus, he is less normal but more revolutionary.³⁸

In the ill-fated woman characters of the the two playwrights, we may see more striking contrasts between them than in the man characters. Shakespeare's all-submissive Desdemona, who has no will of her own but her husband's, his devoted Juliet and his filial Ophelia whose life is likened to a sad but beautiful lyric are now replaced by the multifarious types of the so-called new women, such as Nora, Rebecca, and Hedda Gabler. Often they are the complete antitheses of their female ancestors. The movement for woman's rights of the nineteenth century and the social demand for their entering into the professions has completely changed their traditional qualities.

6. Finale

The comparison of the tragic characters between Shakespeare and Henrik Ibsen may give us an insight into the development of human mind in general in the past several hundred years. In *Hamlet*, *Iago*, *Rebecca*, *Solness* and

36. Solness was on the verge of mental breakdown because he cherished the belief that his professional success was secured at the expense of his own happiness.

37. The fanatic Norwegian clergyman was at last stoned by his followers and driven out into the snow to be buried in the avalanche.

38. By practicing his "All or Nothing" philosophy, Brand went so far as to be indifferent to the 'petty' sufferings of his wife and children, and allowed them to die on the altar of fraternity.

Gregers Werle, we have witnessed that the greatest conflicts experienced by man have been shifted from a struggle between good and evil to a struggle between old and new, in which we're able to find neither heroes nor villains since each has a cause on their side. The dramatis personae of the modern drama are seen as less independent and heroic than those of the traditional type. Much of the conventional ethics and dramaturgy have been discarded in the dramas of Ibsen who ridicules the so-called orthodoxy and frequently describes how honorable people have lived upon lies and scandals. The dramatic struggle of the conventional style has been given up probably because of the following reasons: 1. The levelling of social hierarchy and the rise of the middle class with its lukewarm viewpoint of everything 2. The diversities of modern society render the ethical distinction between good and evil a very difficult thing 2. Modern psychologists' analysis of the mind; as Freud's theory of the unconscious and his analysis of personality in terms of id, ego and superego, incidentally gives every man an equal standing in regard to his moral conduct.

The struggle between the old and the new, between the conventional and the revolutionary permeated practically all over Ibsen's new dramas. This is something which is completely unimaginable to the Elizabethan writers.

Yet there is another more significant difference between the literary creations of the two eras. In the characterization of Rosmer, Rebecca and Gregers Werle, Ibsen has probed deeper into the mechanism of our mind than Shakespeare has ever done — the will of man is seen as more flexible and dynamic for which our unconscious functions often play a large part. Furthermore, through the arrangement of his plots we are able to see more accurate correlation between the mind and its material reality.

On the other hand, Shakespeare, Who is unique in his characterization of Hamlet, Iago and Lady Macbeth, is more universal in the depiction of human nature. In his magnificent dramatic compositions, he has arrayed a pageant of life that no other dramatist has yet equalled. Probably influenced by the medieval theory of the humors (a kind of the rudimental physiology), he was not able to be completely free from the traditional dramaturgy and therefore has devised most of his tragic heroes as if they could be complete masters of their own fate if they had not the deadly flaws in them which were thought to be inherent by nature.

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