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Hamartia and Catharsis in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Bahram Beyzaie's *Death of Yazdgerd*

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Abstract. *King Lear* (1606) is one of the political tragedies of Shakespeare in which the playwright censures Lear's hamartia wreaking havoc not only upon people's lives but bringing devastation on his own kindred. Shakespeare castigates Lear's wrath, sense of superiority, and misjudgments which lead to catastrophic consequences. In *Death of Yazdgerd* (1979), an anti-authoritarian play, Bahram Beyzayie, the well-known Persiaian tragedian, also depicts the hamartia of King Yazdgerd III whose pride and unjust treatment of people end in devastation. By demonstrating such defective and reprehensible tragic heroes, both playwrights set at providing audience with an anti-heroic representation of the kings and also shattering the common god-like heroism attributed to hero kings. Bearing in mind the political instability of England after the succession of James I, Shakespeare avails himself of such anti-heroic representation to forewarn those monarchs incapable of maintaining a balance between their judgments and the society's need for a genuine authority. In a similar fashion, Beyzayie narrates the true historical event of a Persian king whose improper exercise of authority, withdrawal from battle, and an ultimate escape leave people helpless against the invasion of Arabs. The article initially aims to discuss the concept of hamartia within the tragedies based on Aristotle's definition of hamartia and golden mean; by defining the nature of the kings' unforgivable errors and their extremely imbalanced temperament, the paper demonstrates how such ignoble failure relegates the hero kings to anti-heroes whose punishment equals their mistakes. Contrary to Aristotle's idea, the article also elucidates how Shakespeare and Beyzaie have caused the audiences' catharsis of emotion not through fear and pity but through the creation of a sense of justice by portraying characters who deserve their ultimate downfall.

Introduction

Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 B.C) has always been regarded as a valuable guide for playwrights of all ages to follow its fundamental rules of producing drama. While discussing the rules for a tragic imitation, Aristotle brings to notice some sophisticated concepts such as "hamartia" and "catharsis" which a tragedian is supposed to develop and reinforce in a tragedy. These two elusive concepts have always been significant yet quite perplexing not only for tragedians but also for theorists and critics to grasp and define.

The meanings of the word hamartia fall under three categories: "to miss the mark; to fail in some object or make a mistake; and to offend morally, to do wrong" [1]. Various explanations have been offered based on what Aristotle defined as hamartia. Many critics assert that hamartia is an error of judgment resulting from ignorance or arrogance while others contend that it is a moral mistake or flaw covering a gamut of faults resulting from emotional climaxes including wrath. According to Aristotle, "Wrongdoings of the class of hamartia is just the type of wrongdoing which is pitied and forgiven in the proper tragic sense...hamartia does not mean a disposition of deliberate wickedness" [2]. We pity and forgive such mistakes while condemn deliberate wickedness. Based on his analysis of the concept of hamartia in *Poetics*, J. M. Bremer maintains that hamartia means "a wrong action committed in ignorance of its nature, effect, etc., which is the starting point of a causally connected train of events ending in disaster" [3].

While enumerating the characteristics of a tragic hero, Aristotle held that the tragic hero's downfall is the result of a hamartia stemming from the imbalance of his temperament. This lack of balance which is the violation of what Aristotle called the "golden mean" could lead to extreme

passionate personality traits such as wrath or arrogance which in turn cause the hero to make irrevocable decisions. According to Aristotle,

The good life requires moderation in those spheres of activity in which reason must co-operate with the appetites and passions. Here we must always aim at the golden mean which lies between the extremes of too little and too much, at the courage which is the mean between the extremes of cowardice and rashness, at the proper pride which lies between abject humility and vanity, at the temperance which lies between abstinence and indulgence, at the liberality which lies between miserliness and extravagance, at the friendliness which lies between surliness and obsequiousness. [4]

A tragic hero's hamartia resulting from the lack of moderation precipitates his downfall and reverses his fortune causing his fall from happiness to misery or what Aristotle termed as "peripeteia".

Another noteworthy concept discussed in *Poetics* is "catharsis" which seems even more puzzling than the concept of "hamartia". Aristotle contended that tragedy is the imitation of an action "presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves, through pity and fear (or more accurately through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents) the catharsis of such incidents" [5]. Originally, catharsis is a process of psychological purification in which the person is purged of his extreme emotions. Aristotle introduced the emotions of fear and pity as the desired effects of a tragedy upon the audience and asserted that "catharsis is a process of intellectual clarification in which the concepts of pity and fear are clarified by the artistic representation of them" [5]. As the audience is purged of these emotions, the proper emotional balance is achieved and Aristotle's golden mean is realized through the catharsis of extreme emotions. Regarding the emotions that a tragedy arouses, the tragic hero must be neither an extremely good man or what Aristotle called "Enkratês" nor a deliberately wicked man or "Adikos"; the tragic hero must be an intermediate man or "Akratês" who basing upon the "fundamental threefold classification of human moral type" harbors good intentions but fails to fulfill his desired intentions and thus arouses pity [2].

Unlike the wicked man who commits evil acts consciously and therefore deserves punishment, and unlike the good man who never yields to evil impulses, the intermediate man evokes our pity since he does not deserve his downfall. In fact, "it is not the act that is pitiable, but the fall from good fortune to bad. The effect is spoilt either if the agent is Enkratês, when his fall is morally repulsive; or if he is vicious and bad, when it is not pitiable, since his suffering is deserved, and pity concerns one whose misfortune is undeserved [1]. As a character who does not intend to wrong, Akratês is not morally responsible for the unintended wrongdoing but as an agent, he must pay for his mistakes and decisions. Whether committing an error of judgment or an unintended mistake, the tragic hero is the man who "commits injury in ignorance, without evil intent, but it is not a chance error, for the cause of the injury or error lies in himself" [6]. In the sections that follow, the article will address the concepts of "hamartia" and "catharsis" and their application to two British and Persian plays: William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Bahram Beyzaie's *Death of Yazdgerd*.

Discussion

I. Hamartia in *King Lear* and *Death of Yazdgerd*

In *King Lear* (1606), Shakespeare's renowned tragedy, and in *Death of Yazdgerd* (1979), the outstanding tragedy by the Iranian dramatist, Bahram Beyzaie, both playwrights offer a vivid yet negative portrayal of Lear, the king of Britain, and Yazdgerd III, the Persian king. In both plays, the audience confronts hero kings whose hamartias bring about not only their downfall but also destruction upon their surroundings and more devastatingly upon innocent people.

Shakespeare portrays a king, whose supreme arrogance, innate sense of superiority, great wrath, and error of judgment wreak havoc on the British territory. From the first moment, Shakespeare introduces his audience to a king whose susceptibility to the obsequiousness of his

daughters and other acquaintances ruins his whole kingdom and reduces him to abject misery. Lear distributes his kingdom based on his daughters' flattery and gives the kingdom to Goneril and Regan who flatter him most while banishing Cordelia who expresses her genuine yet unrequited love with no sycophantic words. Proving himself as not only a cruel father but a ruthless dictator, Lear reveals his evil and selfish nature by giving his kingdom to his wicked daughters who harbor evil motives. It is such susceptibility to flattery that comes under censure by Shakespeare who regards it as a weak point for a king who is supposed to rule over a country. Such a reason on which Lear bases his judgment so as to weigh the love of his daughters and distribute his lands is unconvincing and unjustifiable. As Hadfield states, "the problem is that he then gives his kingdom away foolishly to his evil daughters, retaining the name of king and a supposed vestige of power, before his redemption begins on the heath with the poorest and least visible of his former subjects" [7]. Lear acts so irrationally and rashly that his two other daughters, Regan and Goneril "are startled by how big a fool he is, and they realize that they have to be on their guard to stop him from ever having the power to do to them what he's just done to Cordelia" [8].

Besides his susceptibility to sycophancy, Lear's arrogance deteriorates the condition further. Lear's sense of superiority is his greatest hamartia which acts as the main internal force pushing him towards inaccurate judgment, insistence on his rash decisions, and ultimately destruction and downfall. Regarding himself as a "dragon" and his anger as the "wrath" of the dragon, Lear ignores the honesty of Cordelia and leaves his kingdom within the hands of his dishonest daughters. "He is filled with self-love" [9] and such selfishness does not allow him to discern the truth and value the honesty of Cordelia expressed through blunt words. It does not let him see through the dishonesty of Regan and Goneril who use flattering words to receive a greater share. With Cordeila, Lear's inflated ego flattered by Goneril and Regan is suddenly deflated and wounded before his acquaintances and courtiers. Unable to see his masculine arrogance being hurt and feeling insecure to lose his authority and royal pride, Lear banishes her daughter in an attempt to remove the source that has rendered him impotent, powerless, and insecure. Even Lear's question as to "which of you shall we say doth love us most" [10] stems from his egotistical and self-centered character which is responded with the desired words Lear likes to hear. Such a stupid question on which Lear bases his judgment requires a stupid answer as well; in fact, Lear receives what he himself asks for. If his love for his daughters was true, why would he desire to be generous to them based on their flattery? If Lear's feeling towards his daughters was true fatherly love, he would not bother to expect anything in return except their happiness. As Ashton holds, "At the opening of the play he is old, self-indulgent, with the cancer of jealous and selfish pride eating away at his heart and mind" [9]. In his failed attempt at satisfying his bloated ego, Lear not only finds his ego wounded by the honesty of Cordelia but finds his kingdom in ruin ultimately.

After the events following Lear's distribution of his kingdom and with Regan and Goneril's abandonment of their father, Lear gradually realizes the truth regarding the deceitfulness of his daughters. Lear sees through the faithfulness and fidelity of Cordelia but does not want to admit the veracity of her words. Once more, Lear finds himself entangled between acknowledging his fault and his sense of arrogance which deters him from hurting his already bruised ego once again. Losing his palace which is an emblem of his pride and vanity, Lear clings to his army of knights as the last discernable traces of his kingly possessions. His sense of identity defined through his possessions is shattered when Regan and Goneril order the disbanding of his army which they claim will lead to the dissipation of the country's resources. Having lost his identity, Lear is now a commoner whose kingly pride and possessions have deserted him and whose oblivion has passed into cognizance. He has become aware of his inaccurate judgment and untimely wrath yet still cannot swallow his pride and assume responsibility for his faults.

Having been stripped of his possessions and identity, Lear, unconsciously puts on the mask of insanity so as to escape with impunity and prevent his bloated ego from being damaged further. He goes mad to salvage his pride unaware that through disguise he merely deludes himself into believing that he is still a mighty king. The moment Lear sees the truth behind everything, he decides to deny such awareness by saying: "I have full cause of weeping, but this heart shall break

into a hundred thousand flaws or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad" [10]. Seething with frustration and being unable to recognize his stripped self, Lear states, "Does any here know me? This is not Lear. Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes Either his notion weakens, his discerning Are lethargied - Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so! Who is it that can tell me who I am?" [10]. Lear prefers to be pronounced insane and demented yet live under the delusion of still being a king. Being insane, passive, and indifferent aids him in distorting and escaping reality and evading responsibility for his faults. For Lear, madness is more desirable than agonizing over the loss of his kingdom and witnessing his arrogance being shattered. Insanity is the means through which Lear makes an attempt at the evaporation of self so as not to see and not to be seen.

Lear's hamartia stems from his inability to strike a balance between his volatile temperament and his arrogant manner as a king. As Myers contends, "The usual consequence of this heroic extremism is exactly what experience has taught the sensible man to expect: the tragic hero lives intensely but not long...If we judge him by the standards of the ordinary sensible man, he fails, through a lack of moderation, to realize the supreme good of a long and complete life. And it is doubtless this failure which Aristotle has in mind when he ascribes the tragic hero's misfortune to his hamartia" [4]. Lear's inability to distinguish between justifiable pride required for a king and sheer arrogance, leads to acts of pure selfishness and their devastating consequences. In fact, Lear "has never learned to dominate his passions" [9] and moderate his excessive feelings of anger and arrogance. The supreme arrogance fills Lear with uncontrollable seething rage and prevents him from making accurate judgments. This lack of moderation is also the reason behind his insanity which deters him from appearing normal and acting sensibly.

In the storm scene, Lear encounters Edgar who has disguised himself as Tom O'Bedlam. Tom's wretched existence acts as the poignant reminder of Lear's wounded pride; Tom's tattered clothes also accentuate Lear's lack of identity revealed without his kingly silk garment and kingdom. While confronting Tom, Lear bemoans his loss of kingdom and identity by uttering in disgust:

Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton hereby. [10]

Unable to find himself wretched before a beggar, Lear calls Tom "thing" by which he unconsciously refers to himself who is nothing without his kingly possessions, army of knights, and purple robe. On the heath, in the storm, Lear confronts natural justice while being exposed to the elements. Despite acting insanely, Lear is aware he is being punished by nature for his mistakes; he displays modesty to some extent and attempts to forget his arrogance by tearing his clothes which symbolize his divine power. He is no more a man of great wrath and pride, but a commoner. As Northrop Fry contends,

What is happening is that he has lost his identity as a king in the body peculiar to a king, but is beginning to recover his royal nature in his other body, his individual and physical one; not just the body that is cold and wet, but the mind that realizes how many others are cold and wet, starting with the Fool and Poor Tom. ...Whatever his actual size, Lear is a giant figure, but his gigantic dimensions are now not those of a king or hero; they are those of a human being who suffers but understands his affinity with others who suffer. [8]

But Lear realizes the true nature of affairs, swallows his pride, and acknowledges his faults when it is too late. Lear realizes the true meaning of pride, kingly wrath, and moderation when he loses his daughter. In the end, Lear has grandeur not the sheer arrogance of a dictator; he is now a fit king to rule but it is too late.

In *Death of Yazdgerd* (1979), Beyzaie, too, portrays a Persian king whose inability to face reality, acknowledge his faults, and swallow his pride cause catastrophic consequences. Beyzaie

narrates the true story of Yazdgerd III who escaped the battlefield while defending his country against the invasion of Arabs. The story unfolds the events after Yazdgerd's escape and directs trenchant criticism at his hamartia. Yazdgerd's hamartia is of great magnitude and has more disastrous consequences than that of Lear's. As the story begins, the audience is placed within a trial where the two classes of the society are discussing and defending their causes while blaming each other in a bid to seek justice. After Yazdgerd's escape, his attendants follow the traces of his horse to the dilapidated house of a miller who lives with his wife and daughter. The king's followers accuse the poor family of regicide. From then on, the audience confronts a long discussion in which each member of the family switches roles in order to vindicate himself/herself by illustrating Yazdgerd's hamartia and castigating his unforgivable mistakes.

Eulogizing Yazdgerd as a man of heroic stature, the followers vilify commoners by regarding them as servants or slaves of the king expected to sacrifice their lives at his call. The followers are looking for someone to blame for the death of Yazdgerd despite the fact that the person who is culpable is Yazdgerd himself. Finding themselves trapped, the family members attempt to recount the events leading to Yazdgerd's death. Through revealing Yazdgerd's hamartia, the family involves the king's attendants and the audience in a new court in which Yazdgerd and his followers are now to blame [11]. Within the conversation carried on between the miller's family and the attendants, it is revealed that Yazdgerd has always been inattentive to the plight of his people and unconcerned about their welfare. Yazdgerd admits, "I confined myself in Ctesiphon ignorantly; I turned my back on my own people and the world turned its back on me" [12]. While talking to the leader of the army and reminding him of the oppression of Yazdgerd and his followers, the miller's wife addresses them, "you have oppressed us for a long while; the difference between you and me is the sword which you have unsheathed" [12]. Therefore, not only Yazdgerd, but also his followers are to blame for the oppression of people and the abandonment of innocent people amidst the invasion of Arabs.

Yazdgerd's hamartia is not only his indifference towards his people and his escape, but more devastatingly his insistence on his faults. Like Lear, Yazdgerd does not acknowledge his mistakes in order to salvage his injured pride and maintain his sense of superiority. Unlike the ignorant nature of the tragic hero's hamartia [13], Lear and Yazdgerd commit hamartias knowingly out of arrogance and insist on their mistakes. The miller's family narrate that upon Yazdgerd's entrance to their house, he starts to act aggressively and irrationally while repeatedly proclaiming himself a king. Yazdgerd seeks to justify his unwise decisions and vindicate himself by inventing excuses so as to soothe his guilty conscience. Like Lear, he is aware of his faults yet is incapable of acknowledging them as a result of sheer arrogance. He puts on the mask of insanity and aggressiveness to blur his mistakes, redeem his unsavory character, and escape censure. Yazdgerd adopts a belligerent and arrogant attitude to assuage his troubled conscience and salvage his already wounded pride. He knows he is the one supposed to be responsible for the protection of the people whom he deserted and ignored. As Yazdgerd confesses, "with the death of a king, a whole nation will die" [12]; or somewhere else he states, "A king is the head and people its body" [12]. Looking for pathetic excuses, Yazdgerd claims that he is escaping from his own army which is blameworthy for demonstrating utter incompetence. Blaming his horse for his own faults, Yazdgerd claims that, "My horse deserted me and ran away in the storm of battle" [12].

Beyzaie criticizes Yazdgerd's supreme arrogance as his greatest hamartia. The miller recalls that Yazdgerd has been plagued by a disturbing dream while staying in the mill. Yazdgerd describes his nightmare as such, "I was bare feet in a desolate desert where there was no thorn or grass but sword" [12]. His nightmare signifies death and destruction as the ultimate destiny of Persia; the desert stands for Persia invaded by Arabs which smells of blood and murder. The whole nightmare uncovers the truth that in Yazdgerd's unconscious, death and devastation will be the not-too-distant future of his kingdom. He knows that such a gloomy future represented in his dream is the consequence of his irresponsibility and cowardice but in reality his arrogance prevents him from acknowledging the truth and shouldering blame for his misconduct [14].

Boosting and flattering his inflated ego by humiliating the family, Yazdgerd makes them an object of mockery and enhances his god-like stature among them; the miller recounts that as Yazdgerd's requests were turned down by the family, he shouted, "I am the king! Behold me! I am the king!" [12]. Yazdgerd, who has disregarded people's welfare and has been negligent in handling political and military affairs of the country, resembles Lear who distributes his kingdom imprudently and causes its destruction. As a result of their hamartias, both have become wanderers in their own countries with no sanctuary to seek. Both have lost their kingly possessions which used to shape their identities. As it is observed, Yazdgerd is hardly recognizable as a king to the miller's family without his kingly garment, army, and palace [14]. The same is true with Lear who finds himself hopeless and wretched after losing his possessions. Maintaining a façade of anxiety and apprehension, Yazdgerd narrates that his attendants deserted him and that the whole world left him alone and desperate. But it is not the world turning its backs on Yazdgerd and Lear; it is their arrogance and disregard of truth that have darkened their world. Such a dark chaotic world is the outcome of their own misconducts and mistakes not the innocent peoples'; their arrogance urges them to condemn the world for what they themselves committed.

Like Lear, Yazdgerd desires to vanish from sight in order to escape punishment and salvage his wounded pride. The woman claims that, "for three times, Yazdgerd implored the miller to kill him in return for gold coins which my husband turned down" [12]. Yazdgerd asks the miller to kill him and sell his head in the bazaar as many people are thirsty for his blood. He knows as the result of his faults, many are hunting him but he does not have the effrontery to swallow his pride and acknowledge his faults [15]. Yazdgerd repeatedly reminds the miller of the latter's wretched existence while boasting about his own lavish lifestyle and sumptuous palace in Ctesiphon. This is while the miller's displays more fortitude and courage by defending such a coward and incompetent king and not betraying him. The miller's wife refuses Yazdgerd's request and retorts, "You have said before, that with your death, a nation dies, so how could we murder a nation?" [12]; this reveals the bitter truth that despite the people's faith in their king as the head of a body, Yazdgerd does not have the slightest hint of what it means to be a king.

As the story continues, the miller's family who is being accused of regicide, decide to claim that the corpse found in the house is not the king's but the miller's and the person who is alive is Yazdgerd. To their consternation, the king's attendants are incapable of identifying the body as they have never seen Yazdgerd in person. This substantiates the charge against Yazdgerd whose hamartias are his arrogance and indifference towards his people. If Yazdgerd were a stranger to his attendants, how could he be a friend or a protector for a nation? Such a disregard of all the people surrounding him justifies Yazdgerd's claim regarding his escape from his attendants and also the fact that the only one close to him that saw his countenance was his horse which according to Yazdgerd deserted him as well.

The family recounts that in his attempts to enrage the miller, Yazdgerd sends the miller to gather firewood while he coaxes the miller's wife to elope with him. Now, a king, whose primary duty is the protection of lives, assumes the role of a violator and trespasser [14]. The miller confesses that as he witnesses the horrific scene of the seduction of his wife and later his daughter by Yazdgerd, he murders him out of rage. The woman who seemed to have allied herself with Yazdgerd momentarily, stands up for her family by arousing the miller's antagonism as she shouts, "kill him, kill him" while the miller says, "yes, I killed him, yes, and I am glad" [12]. In fact, he has killed Yazdgerd in order to defend his woman who, according to the ancient Persian culture, represents a nation that is now tarnished or rather invaded by a king. With his unforgivable hamartias, Yazdgerd's existence is more intolerable than Arabs' as he invades the people and women of his own country.

Upon hearing Yazdgerd's unfair and abominable abuse of the woman, the king's attendants remain silent but still unable to acknowledge the truth as they swell with the same pride as Yazdgerd does. The miller's wife closes the play by asserting that the real judges of Persia's current are the Arabs who will rule over Persia as new kings: "your white flag has done us harm, let alone the black flag of Arabs" [12]. The white flag of Yazdgerd symbolizing peace has brought them

destruction, so what can be expected of the enemy's black flag? As a result of Yazdgerd and his followers' incompetence, arrogance, and inefficiency, Persians are going to be oppressed more than before.

II. Catharsis in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Beyzaie's *Death of Yazdgerd*

Hamartias on behalf of kings lead to catastrophic consequences; Lear and Yazdgerd are fallible humans yet their pre-eminent position as kings makes their mistakes more colossal and their consequences more disastrous. As kings, Lear and Yazdgerd's fate represents the fate of common people, thus their faults, suffering, and vicissitudes are disturbing yet realistic pictures of their subjects' lives. The tragic hero, as defined by Aristotle, is an ordinary person whose downfall arouses the feelings of pity and fear in the audience. As Golden holds, "Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis must refer to the process of adjusting any excess or deficiency in the emotions of pity and fear in the audience to a proper mean" [5]. As Aristotle explained, the audience is filled with pity and fear as he faces the tragic hero who is an ordinary person like him and is purged of pity and fear at the end of a tragedy as he is assured he has not been racked with the pain the tragic hero went through. This way the audience is left with a sense of reconciliation as the emotional equilibrium is realized.

According to Aristotle, what befalls a tragic hero is more than what he deserves; such undeserved punishment brings about pity and fear. Therefore, based on Aristotle's statement, Lear and Yazdgerd, as tragic heroes, do not deserve their punishment which is the cause of the audience's sense of pity and fear. But besides being a common person, the tragic hero is also a man of high stature, someone whose judgments will affect a nation and alter their destiny. Lear and Yazdgerd cannot resist the forces that push them towards acting arrogantly. Their mistakes could be called a noble failure as it is their own internal force, that is, their sense of superiority that pushes them forward. Such a mistake on behalf of a hero king leads to disastrous consequences and does not absolve that person from blame but burdens the person with tremendous responsibility. It can be asserted that the theory of catharsis as presented by Aristotle fails to provide the audience with a definite explanation of the purgation of emotions and a sense of reconciliation; it also ignores the notion of justice and is not applicable to all tragedies either:

Theory of catharsis, as Aristotle presents it, ignores the manifest intention of the Greek tragic poets to demonstrate the fundamental conditions of human destiny. Aeschylus, the inventor of tragedy, obviously regarded himself as a teacher of personal freedom and his tragedies as striking illustrations of the divine justice which finally prevails in human affairs. Euripides was torn between a desire to equal the triumphs of his predecessors in demonstrating the justice of strange dooms and a desire to surpass them by using drama to expose the injustices of the status quo in society. Each poet developed a distinctive attitude or solution, but all aimed at the solution of one and the same problem, the problem of justice; and it would be ridiculous to say of any one of them that as an artist in tragedy his purpose was merely to play upon the emotions of the spectator or to afford the spectator a healthful but inexplicable pleasure. [4]

In fact, the catharsis of emotions or the sense of reconciliation could be best achieved if Aristotle provided his audience with a tragedy where the sense of justice is realized. But Aristotle fails to provide his audience with such explanation and suffices it to say that catharsis is achieved with the audience realizing that he does not experience the same sufferings as the tragic hero does. Aristotle's claim regarding the tragic hero's undeserved punishment is not applicable to Lear and Yazdgerd's situation since their downfall is the consequence of their own faults and therefore well-deserved. Shakespeare and Beyzie's portrayal of their tragic heroes evokes not fear or pity but disapprobation; in fact, Lear and Yazdgerd's hamartia draws condemnation from the audience rather than evoking pity and fear. They choose the wrong course of action and we blame their mistakes and judgments. In this case "we tend not to have much pity for the tragic hero, for it was his fault" that brought about his downfall [6]. It can be observed that "Aristotle's preoccupation

with the emotional effect of tragedy obliged him to ignore the plain and obvious fact that every true tragedy is a demonstration of the justice of the unalterable conditions of human experience" [4]. Depicting the idea of justice, Shakespeare and Beyzaie appreciate the fact that, "this is man himself as the efficient Cause of his own actions and consequently of his happiness or unhappiness. That is, the motive power for good or bad action lies within man himself" [2].

Emphasizing the notion of justice, Shakespeare and Beyzaie outwit the classical notions of tragedies and rise above them; they invite their audience to react to the oppression and injustice caused by the heroes' hamartias. As Reza Baraheni maintained, "In *Death of Yazdgerd*, Beyzaie has achieved a new interpretation of the ancient tragedy" [16]; unlike other tragedies which provide the audience with a pathetic image of heroes and their downfalls, Shakespeare and Beyzaie offer a realistic picture of the kings while criticizing them harshly yet justifiably. Beyzaie's realistic and negative portrayal of Yazdgerd convinces the audience that the punishment Yazdgerd faces is even less than his unforgivable mistakes. As the attendants hang Yazdgerd, the audience is not only satisfied with the just retribution but is infuriated and wishes to react and criticize. The audience does not merely sympathize with the tragic hero and remain passive but desires to react against the injustices and mistakes that can ruin a nation. While discussing the Aristotelian aesthetics of tragedy, Bertolt Brecht criticizes the Aristotelian theatre "for its preference for dramatic narratives that please but do not instruct or provide real learning about the source of human suffering. Brecht attacks Aristotelian catharsis as a kind of "opium of the masses," arguing that empathizing with characters prevents viewers from reflecting critically on the social causes of human suffering" [17]. Both Beyzaie and Shakespeare help their audiences experience not only a sense of relief (as justice is realized) but a sense of reaction as well. They undermine the passive role attributed to the audience and invest them with a spirit of rebelliousness and protest. While reading *King Lear* and *Yazdgerd*, the audience finds the causes of injustices and human suffering and the grounds for rising against such injustices. It could be asserted that, "the central advantage that Brecht claims for his theater over Aristotelian theater is that it allows the audience to engage in critical reflection, what Brecht refers to as "freedom of thought" [17].

Yazdgerd and Lear are both punished for their faults; Yazdgerd is killed by the miller as the representative of the Persian society and his corpse is hanged instead of the miller's. Lear loses his kingdom, his daughters, and his life as a result of his arrogance. With their punishment, a sense of justice is served and the audience is relieved and purged not in the Aristotelian sense of the word but in a new sense. The audience is not merely relieved to see he is not inflicted by the same suffering, but mainly relieved to see the blameworthy are punished for their faults. The origin of the story of Lear is "one of a series of legends about the ancient history of Britain" which is based on a number of sources" [8]. Unlike the sources of this tragedy, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* and the chronicle play, *The History of King Leir*, in which Lear is restored to the crown, Shakespeare "grants Lear no ultimate redemption; Cordelia is murdered and the grief-stricken Lear dies, leaving the kingdom in limbo with his heirs all dead" [7]. In Shakespeare's version, Lear is punished so that the audience not only finds relief but takes lessons seeing the consequences of acting dictatorially.

Depicting Lear and Yazdgerd as inauthentic and incompetent rulers, Shakespeare and Beyzaie set at offering an anti-heroic representation of tragic heroes and shattering the common heroism ascribed to hero-kings. Shakespeare is criticizing a dictator who assumes not only the role of a god-king but also a god-father. As Harold Bloom contends, "Lear is as much a fallen, mortal god as he is a king" [18]. On the surface, Lear may pretend to possess the sublimity but in reality he possesses no authority. At the end of the play, the audience may stereotypically wish to see a heroic picture of a king who is restored to the crown but Shakespeare displays no heroism. The only image which is presented is a repentant king who has lost everything and is waiting for the realization of the divine punishment.

Beyzaie, too, decenters the pivotal role of a king and tarnishes the stereotypical image of a king whose demise will result in the ruin of a nation. Holding a trial for a dead king, who is not even capable of defending himself, Beyzaie sets out to deconstruct the sacred heroism of a king in

Persian literature [14]. For the first time in Persian literature, the concept of regicide is treated realistically yet sarcastically and the grounds for such a sin is explained and expanded upon for the audience. The hanging of a king's body upon the gallows is not a common scene not only in Persian literature but in the literatures of all nations. Deconstructing the ancient myth, Beyzaie challenges the belief that a king inherits its divine kingly stature from God by depicting Yazdgerd as an intruder who abuses women, escapes the battlefield, and commits heinous acts. Downplaying the heroic role of a king, Beyzaie promotes the stature of a common family who condemns Yazdgerd in a trial. In fact, Beyzaie removes the character of Yazdgerd and replaces him with the voice of commoners [11]. " 'Shah koshi' (regicide), was a dramatic tradition in which a king, after his daughter's marriage and reaching senility, is dethroned and is either killed or commits suicide before the crowd" [15]. Employing such a sacrificial fertility ceremony as a means to relegate the heroic role of a king, Beyzaie shatters the sacred image of a king among people and enlighten common people as to their strength and capabilities. He stands by not only the millers family but also all the people who have been oppressed throughout history.

Conclusion

Beyzaie and Shakespeare's portrayal of Yazdgerd and Lear's hamartias illustrates how obnoxious these flaws are particularly for the sovereign of a country. Setting his play in a decrepit mill and placing the poor family in an unfair trial, Beyzaie attempts at recounting part of a history when people suffered oppression and misery. The dilapidated mill, invaded not only by Yazdgerd but by Arabs, stands for Persia and the miserable condition of its people. It stands in contrast with Ctesiphon with its luxurious mansions which bear no resemblance to reality. Beyzaie castigates such remoteness and indifference on behalf of kings, which stems from sheer arrogance, as the main cause of their downfall. The invasion of Arabs forces Yazdgerd to leave his palace and enter the real world where he becomes aware of the desperate and pitiful state people dwell in. Lear's banishment from his daughters' palaces also gives him the opportunity to swallow his pride and confront reality.

Beyzaie and Shakespeare depict such noble failures so as to warn rulers against such disastrous and unforgivable mistakes. As a master of tragedy, "Shakespeare, while representing a bleak universe and a depressing tragedy, never loses sight of the political maneuvers that would have prevented the catastrophe from unfolding" [7]. Shakespeare composed *King Lear* by the close of the Elizabethan era as a warning to James I who had just acceded to the British throne. *King Lear* shows "the consequences of an undesirable succession, but concentrates on what needs to be corrected rather than whether the monarch can be removed. The play can be seen in a tradition of 'mirror for princes' literature, advising and correcting a monarch or those who were in a position to do this" [7]. In fact, most of Shakespeare's plays written before and after Elizabeth's reign revolve around the issue of succession and the authenticity of a ruler. *King Lear* "could be read as a warning to James, already notorious for his promotion of favorites" [7]. Shakespeare warns James against arrogance, wrath, and sycophancy and portrays faithful servants like Kent and Fool who can "keep honest counsel" [10] and whom a king can depend upon as a confidant. Shakespeare forewarns about the future of a kingdom whose king is incapable of governing with justice, wisdom, and humility. He foretells the fate of a king who ignores good advice and warns James who "may well find himself neglecting and banishing his loyal critics and promoting knaves and flatterers if he cuts himself off from his people" [7]. In fact, *King Lear* could be regarded as a warning not only to James but also to all rulers who confine themselves in their palaces, ignore people's plight, and bring about death and destruction.

In *Death of Yazdgerd*, Beyzaie narrates a true historical event about Yazdgerd III, an incompetent Persian king, and warns against arrogance, authoritarian rule, and inefficiency of a monarch. What differentiates Shakespeare's narrative from Beyzaie's is his even more strident criticism of Yazdgerd's hamartia. Through the passage of time, Beyzaie witnessed the devastating consequences of the invasion of Arabs resulting from incompetent rule; therefore he directly experienced oppression, fear, and hardship. According to Barahani, "Yazdgerd's escape is our

national escape and his death, our national awareness” [16]. His escape led to a crisis that had far-reaching long-term consequences for Persians. Beyzaie intends his play to enlighten people regarding the oppression and misery they underwent under authoritarian rule; he encourages people to undermine the authority of a dictator whose divine stature is not to be questioned. Yazdgerd's death had been precipitated by his sheer incompetence. He was not killed by his subjects but he had already been dethroned and murdered by his own hamartia; he dies symbolically as a result of his own mistakes [14]. As the miller's wife states, “Yazdgerd had not been killed here, he had been dead long before coming to our house” [12]. In fact, regicide is a pretext under which Beyzaie attempts to show the destiny of a king whose arrogance, mistakes, and misconduct brings about his downfall.

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