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Indices of the Hegelian Tragedy in Patience Swift's the Last Good Man

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Abstract:

This study examines tragic vision in Patience Swift's The Last Good Man with the aim of establishing the claim that, following the postulations on tragedy by G.W.F Hegel, the tragedy in the novel is both inevitable and paradoxical—inevitable, since the protagonist's world is tragically circumscribed, with no escaping the tragic entrapment, which does not have to be determined by his being good or bad; and paradoxical because he is great and as well flawed, with his greatness being his flaw. The approach to tragedy developed by the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel is the interpretive strategy adopted, a reading strategy which was structured in such a manner as to take into account the catastrophic conclusion, the sense of inevitability, human limitation, suffering and disproportion, and the learning process and acceptance of moral responsibility in the novel. Critics may be tempted to only look at the human limitations of the protagonist, which is a fundamental element of a tragic hero—hubris—without taking into consideration the sense of inevitability and the intricacies of the hero's situation. Because Sam acts both for and against the good, his individuality is as paradoxical as the situation in which he finds himself; hence he is both great and flawed—indeed, his very greatness is his flaw, since greatness in Hegel comes at the price of excluding what the situation demands. Perhaps this is the first study of the novel as tragedy that will take into account the above strategy of reading.

Keywords: Tragedy, struggle, inevitability, nature, paradoxical

1. Introduction

In literary criticism, all the discussion on the nature, function and the effect of the tragedy begins with Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Aristotle had before him the great tragedies written by three Greek dramatists—Sophocles' *Oedipus, Electra* and *Antigone*; Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Medea*; and Aeschylus' *The Seven against Thebes* and *Eumenides*—from which he drew some common characteristics and on their basis evolved his own definition and theory of the tragedy:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of the action, not of narration; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (12)

This definition has been accepted as the standard definition of the tragedy from the age of Aristotle to the present day with the slight variations in the status of the hero.

According to Aristotle, there are six constituent parts of a tragedy: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Song and Spectacle. Of these six parts, which one is the most important? To this question, Aristotle himself remarks that "Plot" is the most important part because it involves 'action'; and according to the definition, "A tragedy is the imitation of action," not of men or characters. According to him, action is first, character is second. So he says: "Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action" (13). And so he concludes that "Without action there cannot be a tragedy, there may be without character" (13). "Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all" (13), writes Aristotle:

...the plot then is the first principle, and as if it were, the soul of a tragedy. Character holds the second...thus tragedy is the imitation of an action, and of the agents mainly with the view of the action. (13)

A tragedy must have a beginning, middle and end:

A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by casual necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself follows that some other things, either by necessity, or as a rule but has nothing following. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows. (14)

Therefore, "the structure of tragic action is developed in such a way as to include reversals, recognitions, and calamity, since it is by these changes that the arousal of fear and pity and their catharsis are achieved" (Akwanya 20).

The chief function of tragedy, according to Aristotle, is to arouse "Pity and Fear"; he always used them as a pair: "pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortunes and fear by that of one like ourselves" (15). Aristotle described pity as a type of pain at an evident evil of a destructive or painful kind in case of somebody who does not deserve it, the evil being one which might be expected to happen to ourselves or some of our friends.

We cannot confine the emotions of pity and fear to the narrow boundaries of self. We feel pity for Oedipus not because we fear that the same might happen to us, but because he is basically noble. Butcher seems to be quite convincing when he says that we do not always fear for ourselves and adds: "the spectator is lifted out of himself. He becomes one with the tragic sufferer and through him with the humanity at large" (23). Aristotle wanted to communicate this effect of tragedy to Plato, who depreciated tragedy saying that it makes man lose his proper personality. Aristotle suggested that the tragic experience helps man to forget his own petty sufferings and identify himself with the fate of mankind.

Tragedy usually focuses on figures of stature whose fall implicates others—a family, an entire group, or even a whole society—and typically the tragic protagonist becomes isolated from his or her society. In the tragic vision, the possibility of a happy ending is unrealized, although it is sometimes suggested, as when Lear is briefly reconciled to Cordelia in *King Lear*. When tragedy pauses to look at comedy, it views such a happy ending as an aborted or by-passed possibility. At best, it acknowledges "what might have been" as an ironic way of magnifying "tragic waste." In the tragic vision, something or someone dies or lapses into a winter of discontent.

One of the most significant contrasts between classical drama and modern is the difference in the protagonists and the nature of their struggle. Classical tragedy, for instance, involves royalty, the elite. The characters are mainly from a royal or elite family, for example, Hamlet, Antigone or King Oedipus. The idea was that for a character to have a great and far-reaching influence over society he/she had to be in a position of great power and authority.

In contrast, modern drama often uses common people as protagonists. John Synge, for instance, uses Irish peasants in his tragedy, *Riders to the Sea*, even though the play imitates Greek tragedy. Modern tragedies mainly focus on the life of common people, and characters are mainly from the middle class. Example is Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. In modern drama, tragedy can be indicative of a society, without totally involving and disrupting that society.

The idea of struggle is fundamental to both traditional and modern drama. In the latter, we have a "society, the men rooted in it, and the relationships against which they are incapable of successful struggle," while the former portrays "great personalities who challenge and struggle against relationships 'though it might mean ruin'" (Lukács 434). In classic tragedy, the protagonist faces his downfall because of his tragic flaw. Fate is the reason behind the tragic flaw. For example, Dr Faustus and Prometheus. In modern tragedy, the traditional tragic flaw remains intact. However, man, not fate, is himself the reason behind his own tragic flaw. An example is Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*.

In tragedy, there seems to be a mix of seven interrelated elements that help to establish what we may call the "Tragic Vision": the conclusion is catastrophic; the catastrophic conclusion will seem inevitable; it occurs, ultimately, because of the human limitations of the protagonist; the protagonist suffers terribly; the protagonist's suffering often seems disproportionate to his or her culpability; yet the suffering is usually redemptive, bringing out the noblest of human capacities for learning; and of course the suffering is also redemptive in bringing out the capacity for accepting moral responsibility. While these will be methodologically examined in our textual analysis, it is on the Hegelian model of analysis that our interpretive strategy would be based.

2. The Interpretive Strategy

An interpretive strategy simply implies research methodology. And for us, it is Hegel's approach to tragedy. For Hegel, "tragedy is the conflict of two substantive positions, each of which is justified, yet each of which is wrong to the extent that it fails either to recognise the validity of the other position or to grant it its moment of truth; the conflict can be resolved only with the fall of the hero" (Roche 12).

The original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has *justification*, while on the other hand each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by negating and *damaging* the equally justified power of the other. Consequently, in its moral life, and because of it, each is just as much involved in *guilt*. (Hegel 523)

Hegelian tragedy is the inevitable consequence of the absolute realizing itself in history. In the course of history, "one-sided positions emerge that contain within themselves their own limitations" (486). "These positions give rise to conflicts, which are resolved in each case by the transcendence (or death) of the particular, such that history progresses dialectically, through contradiction and negativity, toward an ever more comprehensive and rational goal" (Roche 12).

While most interpreters of tragedy, beginning already with Aristotle, focus their accounts of tragedy on the effect of tragedy, on its reception, Hegel, along with Friedrich Hölderlin, Friedrich Schelling, and Peter Szondi, is one of the few figures in the tradition to take a different path. Hegel focuses on the core structure of tragedy. And yet Hegel's focus on the structure of tragic collision gives him a new angle on the traditional motifs of fear and pity. For Hegel, the audience is to fear not external fate, as with Aristotle, but "the ethical substance which, if violated, will turn against the hero" (525). Insofar as suffering flows inevitably from the tragic hero's profound identification with a just and substantial position, suffering for Hegel is not quite the undeserved suffering that for Aristotle elicits pity. Hegel reinterprets pity as sympathy not merely with the suffering hero as sufferer but with the hero as one who, despite his fall, is nonetheless in a sense justified. According to Hegel, we fear the power

of an ethical substance that has been violated as a result of collision, and we sympathize with the tragic hero who, despite having transgressed the absolute, also in a sense upholds the absolute. Thus, Hegelian tragedy has an emotional element: we are torn between the values and destiny of each position; we identify with the character's action but sense the inevitable power of the absolute, which destroys the hero's one-sidedness.

As T. S. Eliot asserted in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone," and this is because "His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (4). Hence "The existing order is complete before the new work arrives" (4). The form of tragedy which *The Last Good Man* and *The End of Dark Street* assume already obtains in the literary tradition before the novels' arrival.

Further on this method of analysis, Mark Roche adds thus:

Because the tragic hero acts both for and against the good, her nature is as paradoxical as the situation in which she finds herself: she is both great and flawed—indeed, her very greatness is her flaw, since greatness comes at the price of excluding what the situation demands. The hero is both innocent and guilty—innocent insofar as she adheres to the good by acting on behalf of a just principle; guilty insofar as she violates a good and wills to identify with that violation. Guilt presupposes action for which the hero is responsible; as a result, the hero seeks not sympathy or pity but recognition of the substance of her action, including its consequences. (13)

Precisely because tragedies of collision frequently arise during paradigm shifts, Hegel is attuned to historical conflicts, crises, and transitions. Hegel invites audiences to ask: Which values have come into conflict? Which positions are rooted in the past and which are harbingers of the future? In what ways do individual characters embody the conflicting strands of history? To what extent are forces beyond the hero's intentions and passions shaping the events as they unfold? These are the core questions at the heart of our interpretive strategy. In the above spirit Hegel offers the paradoxical formulation: "It is the honour of these great characters to be culpable" (546).

2.1. Textual Analysis

In tragedy, there seems to be a mix of seven interrelated elements that help to establish what we may call the "Tragic Vision": one, the conclusion is catastrophic; two, the catastrophic conclusion will seem inevitable; three, it occurs, ultimately, because of the human limitations of the protagonist; four, the protagonist suffers terribly; five, the protagonist's suffering often seems disproportionate to his or her culpability; and yet the suffering is usually redemptive, bringing out the noblest of human capacities for learning; and finally, the suffering is also redemptive in bringing out the capacity for accepting moral responsibility. This method of analysis would address these Hegelian questions: Which values have come into conflict? Which positions are rooted in the past and which are harbingers of the future? In what ways do individual characters embody the conflicting strands of history? To what extent are forces beyond the hero's intentions and passions shaping the events as they unfold? Our analysis shall follow these indices, in three broad subdivisions.

2.2. The Sense of Inevitability and Catastrophic End

In tragedy, unlike comedy, the denouement tends to be catastrophic; it is perceived as the concluding phase of downward movement. In comedy, the change of fortune is upward; the happy ending prevails (more desirable than true, says Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism*), as obstacles are dispelled and the hero is happily incorporated into society or form the nucleus of a new and better society. In tragedy, there is the unhappy ending—the hero's fall from fortune and consequent isolation from society, often ending in death. The story of Sam in *The Last Good Man* ends with his death.

To the audience of a tragedy, the catastrophe will seem, finally, to be inevitable. Although tragedy cannot simply be identified with uncontrollable disasters, such as an incurable disease or an earthquake, still there is the feeling that the protagonist is inevitably caught by operating forces which are beyond his control (sometimes like destiny, visible only in their effects). Whether grounded in fate or nemesis, accident or chance, or in a causal sequence set going through some action or decision initiated by the tragic protagonist himself or herself, the operating forces assume the function of a distant and impersonal power. Death is employed by the novelist as metaphor to explain the transient nature of life. Man is constantly locked in the battle of survival with the forces of existence in the same manner that the drowned man in the opening of the novel fought a lost battle against the forces of nature represented by the powerful ocean waves which swept him away in its deadly, tumultuous embrace. This is a tip to answering one of Hegel's questions: to what extent are forces beyond the hero's intentions and passions shaping the events as they unfold?

In the opening chapter of the novel, the peaceful sea-side tranquillity and boisterous sound of bliss is punctured by the cacophony of wailing agony as a man drowns at sea, buried by pounding waves that swept away everything in its path. The human voice unites briefly in a wave of cautious optimism that gradually fades away into bleak despair of pessimism as the tourist, trapped in the water, continues to struggle with the pounding walls of water in a death-struggle. The crowd of holiday makers watches with shocked disbelief and horrifying bafflement at the death of the tourist who arrived at the beach earlier with his family for a jolly good time now gone awry like the bile of sour milk. Among the onlookers at the sea side is Sam, the protagonist, a strong man with a giant body frame who towers in height above everybody at the beach. He draws the ire of the people by making an awkward and annoying comment about the drowning man fighting against the ocean instead of succumbing to its mighty power with docile respect:

Sam had seen it before. He had been caught in rips himself, and knew that they were not dangerous if you showed them respect. Just swim gently, let the rip take you, keep quiet. In half an hour, forty minutes, you'd be half a mile away, in stiller water, and you could swim slowly to the shore, a long way from the village by then. Never fight it.

He smiles. Fancy trying to fight an ocean! A man, and he tries to fight an ocean! Well, he can try, but he'd never seen anyone last more than twenty minutes. The man would be dead very soon. (2–3)

Sam's disposition above is philosophical. He does not understand why a man, a mere mortal, would venture into fighting the forces of nature (the ocean). He rather is of the opinion that man should go with the flow of life and resign to fate, hence "Just swim gently, let the rip take you, keep quiet" (2). This is because fighting natural forces will eventually lead to a catastrophic end—"he'd never seen anyone last more than twenty minutes" while fighting the ocean waves (forces of nature) and "The man would be dead very soon" (3). However, Sam knows not that he is ironically prophesying his own situation, for in the novel he fights the forces that militate against his will, the human will. He refuses to submit to the immanent will—the forces of nature. This immanent will obtains from the fact that his whole existence is already tragically circumscribed—"Sam had seen it before" (2) —and there is no escaping that fate, as metaphorically depicted in the scene of the drowned tourist, which he understands as inevitable (once the subject tries to fight it). And the subject will definitely fight it, for that is what makes him a tragic hero—he has to act, he has to sin, for, as Hegel asserts, "It is the honour of these great characters to be culpable" (546). Hence the sin is only but a hubris, and so not a question of moral stance. Sam's involvement with the two women in his life is a tragic twist to the events of his life. And his death is a tragic end of a love story. Sam's re-embrace of the human society was an ill wind that didn't blow him any good.

2.3. Human Limitation, Suffering and Disproportion

Ultimately, perhaps, all the instances that we find in tragedy of powerlessness, of undeniable human limitations, derive from the tragic perception of human existence itself, which seems, at least in part, to be terrifyingly vulnerable, precarious, and problematic. And it is precisely because of these human limitations that suffering also becomes basic to the tragic vision. Tragedy typically presents situations that emphasize vulnerability, situations in which both physical and spiritual security and comforts are undermined, and in which the characters are pressed to the utmost limits—overwhelming odds, impossible choices, demonic forces within or without (or both). Against the tragic protagonist are the powers that be, whether human or divine, governed by fate or chance, fortune or accident, necessity or circumstance, or any combination of these. The more elevated, the more apparently secure and privileged the character's initial situation, the greater is our sense of the fall, of the radical change of fortune undergone, and the greater our sense of his or her suffering. Tragedy testifies to suffering as an enduring, often inexplicable force in human life.

Sam's limitations start from his childhood, and conditions his adulthood behaviours which are also pointers to his human limitations—the odd human will he exudes like life of isolation and self-alienation. He has a troubled childhood, a life of poverty and lack of education like other kids on the block. Forced out of school by desperate poverty, he became an itinerant wage labourer at an early age, scrounging for crumbs with which to get by in the city. He made a concerted attempt to cater for his poverty-stricken mother with little success. He works at Bridge Farms occasionally for subsistence in a trade by barter arrangement. In a rare show of pathological inconsistency, Sam is seen speaking out loud to inanimate objects like his house and the fridge, in the absence of human contact in his little sea-side sphere of existence.

Does it matter that Sam talks to his kitchen, his house? Well, he could never have pinpointed the moment at which it happened, and perhaps there was no moment. Over the years away on the building sites when he learned his trade, he learned too about his fellow man and he learned to look at an angle always so that he could go quietly about his work and not attract attention. (30)

Sam is physically strong and active, yet lonely. His life is bereft of human communication. He avoids human contact because of his past failed relationship with people, especially at the work sites. They are colleagues who would rather bully and taunt him than accept him on a common platform of equality.

Sam's condition as a social misfit has forced him to withdraw into himself and distance himself from people, learning to break the barrier of social ties by becoming more engrossed with nature through his natural surroundings. To this end, he learns to look at people askance, at an angle in order to prevent direct confrontation. He is comfortable with talking to the items in his house rather than talking to human beings in communication because of the distrust he has for people. This is Sam's weakness. And his tragic end as a result of the inability to handle the eventual contact with the human world shows that he is a victim of his own weakness.

Buried within this sense of weakness in Sam is his inherent goodness. He is a good man.

...he could not distinguish between what he saw as the living components of the world: people, animals, the sea, his house, the farmer's tractor, the food he put in his mouth. He saw the worth or value of each, and he admired the contribution which anything could make to the functioning of the world, and he learned to turn his glance from the destructive, the useless, anything which he could not place within the world as he understood it. (30–31)

Despite being a good man, the fact that he sees the world only from his perspective is a character flaw. Sam is comfortable with his low-profile life in his mother's home by the sea side, surrounded by nature. This makes him unobtrusive, lost to the affairs

of the human society around him. His world is symmetry of existence where rhythm and harmony dwells side by side rather than the cacophony of disorder that reigns in social relationships.

Events in chapter three of the novel reveal the fact that Sam is a man with a good heart that beats with the milk of human kindness. Sam picks up a child washed ashore by the ocean, thus breaking the solitude that has encapsulated his life. He resuscitates the lost child and takes her home, providing her with shelter and food. Rummaging through his mother's belongings, he finds her some footwear. They spend time in the farm gathering food for the evening meal. As he thinks of what to do with her, he discovers to his delight that the girl has a voracious appetite for food. He decides to take a walk with her to the village as a quiet way of advertising her presence and ultimately find the lost girl's parents. Things are made difficult by the silence of the lost girl who would not as much as speak a word in communication with him. It is difficult to tell whether her taciturnity is self-imposed like Sam's.

Sam embarks on a shopping trip to the supermarket in the village for grocery and clothes for the lost girl. The cashier at the counter wrongly over-charges Sam, causing a commotion that the Supervisor quells. This event leads to an unplanned meeting between Sam and Isobel. Sam refuses to talk with her when she attempts to start a conversation. Events take a dagger-point downward spiral, a moment of unfolding awareness that will lead to a tragic resolution. It is interesting to note that both Sam and Isobel came back home from the city after each lost his or her mother. The humdrum existence of Sam's life and the seeming love-empty dreariness of Isobel's life culminate in a crossroads of destiny for the two dominant characters of this great novel with the convoluting twists and turns of life.

The psychological underbelly of Isobel's traumatic and conflicting life is revealed in chapter five. Isobel's indifferent reaction to her mother's postcards, the only means of communication between them following her long absence from home, is an isolated symbol of a family in disarray. Her parents' failed marriage was a marriage where love was hoarded and denied in spite of marital vows and ties. She is in her parents' home and the visit fills her with painful memories. Growing up with her parents in a house of sorrow and marital disappointment, where pettiness and unhappiness reigned informs Isobel's decision to search for true love, even if forbidden, like the unforgettable love story of Abelard and Heloise. This chapter is a searchlight on Isobel's childhood and broken home by reason of her parents' failed marriage. At the height of it, Isobel's father walked away from his home in utter frustration. He ends up living with his sister and her family until his death. Isobel's mother rebuffs every attempt at reconciliation until the final end of her husband's life. Isobel's mother later died from loneliness and complications resulting from cancer.

Sam preoccupies himself with the life at the sea side which for him is a huge source of solace and comfort from the pains of the past. For Sam, the sea is like a foreign country away from home. Isobel enacts a deliberate confrontation with Sam at the sea side. She delves into a dialogue with Sam and recounts a touching and glowing account of memories about Sam's late mother. These recollections became the connecting-point between the two. Sam later accepts her self-imposed invitation to visit his home where she takes pictures of Sam and the lost girl. Sam is pleased with the new image of her mother provided by Isobel. Thus, Sam's solitude and avoidance of human contact because of his sense of childhood insecurity is finally broken.

In fact, by providing him with images which he could never have possessed himself, she had almost closed a circle which had been left open by the unexpected death of his mother ten years ago. As though having someone else now who could validate his own memories and reinforce them with more could provide some kind of finality, some resolution. (139)

The quiet pattern of Sam's life developed slowly after quitting alcohol following his mother's death. It was a riotous lifestyle that made allowance for drunken stupor, unusual night-outs with women of easy virtues. These were part of his physical life at the construction sites. Sam's resurrected life at the sea side after his mother's death is an attempt to have a clean break from his troubled past.

Sam talks to Isobel about his life, the house, and his family, explaining the psychology and philosophy of his silent life at the sea side which contrasts with the noisome disharmony of his life in the city.

And his deep voice began to talk about the house, and how his great grandfather had built it, and how his father and his grandfather had built the steps down onto bedroom. He spoke of the work that needed to be done constantly to resist the battering of the sea-filled winds, how he had to rub down the wood of the windows every other year and re-coat them, and how he had to chip off the paint from the outside wall sometimes to let it dry out fully over the summer before applying a new white protective coat. (143)

The significance of the above interaction is that it shows how Sam is gradually bonding with humans, society, and of course the world he has always avoided. The decision to shelter the strange girl (which is as a result of his goodness) and the free disposition towards Isobel mark this change in Sam. Yet it is this change that leads to the reversal of events in the text and his eventual suffering and death.

After all these years, to be sitting here, talking to a woman in his bedroom. This was so strange, this was unaccountable. But it was like those rip tides, when you don't fight them, but you relax and flow with the current, out into the sea and way away to another part of the shore where it is safe. He felt himself drifting far out, far out from the shore. (144)

Even Sam ironically identifies with his impending fall when he insinuates that his new disposition towards humans "was like those rip tides" that killed the tourist in chapter one, which one does not need to fight, but accept as one of the happenings in life. It is ironical because he does not realize the extent to which his new life would conflict with the old, and thereby plunge him into towing the wrong path; neither does he realise that, contrary to the injunction not to fight the tides, he

is going to wrestle with the Immanent will, he will exercise his hubris, he will act, as that is what makes him a tragic hero. The scene of him kissing Isobel signifies his final submission to the current of his fate. He fights this fate, and from such act emerges his downfall.

Amidst great outpouring of emotion, Isobel reveals her love for Sam, extolling him as the last good man on earth because of his charitable and kind disposition to people. Sam undergoes a transformation with a verve and sparkle to his life after the passionate moment with Isobel. Sam is happy that finally his father, who had a happy marriage characterised by stoicism and companionship, will turn in his grave with satisfaction that his son had found a lady to look after him. Sam day-dreams about settling down with Isobel, which will eventually end his days of isolation. For him, Isobel and the lost girl will make up for a new family, having lost his parents to the cold hand of death. Thus Isobel is happy to find love while Sam is happy to have found a wife and a family. The story reaches a climax with this new development which supposedly meant better days ahead for the two lovers.

In the suffering of the protagonist, there is frequently something disproportionate. Even to the extent that there is some human cause, the eventual consequences may seem too severe since, according to Roche, there is justification for each of the opposed sides in a conflict. But the suffering is inevitable and perhaps disproportionate as long as each position contains within itself its own limitations (Hegel). Moreover, since the factor involved in destroying Sam's one-sidedness is the inevitable power of the absolute, his suffering is expected to be disproportionate. The gun he pulls out during his confrontation with the police in a bid to protect the strange girl is a discarded short gun he found at sea a long time ago. The gun has no cartridge in it. Yet the gun being in his possession is enough to designate him a threat by the authorities, hence the raining of bullets on him by the police and his eventual death. Tragedy acknowledges the occasional disproportion between human acts and their consequences, but imposes or accepts responsibility nevertheless. In this way, pain and fear are spiritualized as suffering, and, as Richard Sewall suggests in *The Vision of Tragedy*, the conflict of man and his "destiny" is elevated to ultimate magnitude.

2.4. *The Learning Process and Acceptance of Moral Responsibility*

Despite the inevitable catastrophe, the human limitation, and the disproportionate suffering, the tragic vision also implies that suffering can call forth human potentialities, can clarify human capacities, and that often there is a learning process that the direct experience of suffering engenders. Indeed, tragedy provides a complex view of human heroism, a riddle mixed of glory and jest, nobility and irony. The madness that is wiser than sanity, the blind who sees more truly than the physically sighted, are recurring metaphors for the paradox of tragedy, which shows us human situations of pitiful and fearful proportions, but also of extraordinary achievement.

Unfortunately, for Sam, the tragic reversal does not afford him any opportunity to retrace his steps. Sam is a man in search of redemption from his past. He is a heavily built man that towers shoulder high among the people in his community. He lives by himself at the sea side but has his life punctuated with unwelcomed change when Isobel and the silent girl come into his life. His re-embrace of the human society was an ill wind that didn't blow him any good. The discovery of the strange girl on the beach creates disequilibrium to his otherwise lonely life of solitude where he enjoys self-company and the company of nature provided by his natural surroundings. This same natural phenomenon (the ocean) that he believes should not be wrestled with conjures a strange girl, whom he embraces and fights to protect, thereby disrupting the order of the universal absolute, the immanent will. The arrival of the two women in his life broke the code of silence and a world of self-seclusion and self-involvement. The resultant change in Sam's world finally culminates in a tragic end for him in spite of his innate goodness. Sam does not live to learn that a man's life will atrophy and become useless if separated from the human family.

Isobel, unlike Sam, is a girl from a broken home that lacks marital bliss, open communication and companionship. A product of divorced couple, she embarks on a search for true love that she has so passionately read about from the bookshelf. Reality hits her like a thunderbolt when she finds love, and notices too late that it is not everything that starts well ends well. The novel seems to suggest that ideal love that is not fraught with challenges is nothing but an illusion.

3. Conclusion

The basic aim of this study is to establish the claim that, following the tenets of modern tragedy, the tragedy in Patience Swift's *The Last Good Man* is both inevitable and paradoxical—inevitable since the protagonist's world is tragically circumscribed, and there is no escaping the tragic entrapment, which does not have to be determined by his being good or bad; and paradoxical because he is both great and flawed, and of course his greatness being his flaw.

The previous readings on tragic vision in Patience Swift's novel have only looked at the human limitations of the protagonist, which is a fundamental element of a tragic hero—hubris—without taking into consideration the sense of inevitability and the intricacies of the hero's situation. Because Sam acts both for and against the good, his nature is as paradoxical as the situation in which he finds himself: he is both great and flawed—indeed, his very greatness is his flaw, since greatness comes at the price of excluding what the situation demands. The present study on tragedy in the novel took into account the above strategy of reading in order to wholesomely contribute to the body of knowledge already prevalent in the area of tragic vision in the text.

In order to unearth this paradoxical formulation, the research asked and resolved the following questions: Which values have come into conflict? Which positions are rooted in the past and which are harbingers of the future? In what ways do

individual characters embody the conflicting strands of history? To what extent are forces beyond the hero's intentions and passions shaping the events as they unfold? These were the core questions at the heart of our interpretive strategy.

Sam is a good man, and yet the fact that he sees the world only from his perspective is his flaw. Being comfortable with his low-profile life in his mother's home by the sea side, surrounded by nature, makes him unobtrusive, and lost to the affairs of the human society around him. His world is symmetry of existence where rhythm and harmony dwells side by side rather than the cacophony of disorder that reigns in social relationships. In the words of Isobel, Sam is the last good man on earth, which implies that it is rare to encounter a man who is so good that it will result in his tragedy.

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