

Glimpses on Aristotelian Tragedy

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Introduction

Aristotle's ideas, on tragedy have had an impact on literature and theater. In his work "Poetics " he explains the aspects and organization of tragedy describing it as a representation of an complete action of a certain magnitude. Tragedy is presented through language enriched with elements focusing on actions than just narration aiming to evoke feelings of pity and fear that lead to the cleansing of these emotions. This article explores the elements of Aristotelian tragedy analyzing its structure, themes and enduring influence, on literature.

In his book "Poetics" Aristotle introduced the concept of tragedy that has become rather influential in the sphere of the study of literature and drama throughout the centuries. Undoubtedly, Aristotle's Poetics is one of the key texts in literary theory that outlines the concepts of tragedy and plays a significant role both for the ancient and the modern theoreticians. Aristotle's conception of the tragedy is as the imitation (mimesis) of a serious and a complete action with certain magnitude using the language that is ornate and the characters' exclusive mode of operation is action as opposed to speech. This is done so that one can stir up pity and fear in the audience hence attaining the effects of catharsis which is a purification of pity and fear.

Aristotle's analysis of tragedy revolves around several key elements: myth and plot or story (mythos), characters/witnesses (ethos), theme or message (dianoia), words or language (lexis), music or tune (melos) and vision or sight or display (opsis). All these elements are highly significant in the building of a tragedy and all serve to heighten the dramatic effect cum feeling on each part of the drama. Sophocles Unfortunately, Aristotle is completely missing the plot here: the plot is indeed the most significant element of tragedy, it forms the very structure of the tragedy. It must be logical, consistent, and total, the culmination of the play must be a moment of final understanding, or turning point that arouses the spectator's sensitive and sentimental side.

The Essence of Tragedy According to Aristotle

What Aristotle meant by tragedy and the fundamental concepts of the work

The "Poetics" by Aristotle is an important work that governs most approaches to analyzing texts and drama at the present time and allows to determine what makes a tragedy. Stressing several elements working in unison, his definition and clarification of tragedy outline several fundamental features that make up the strong and evoking form of drama. They are plot (mythos), character (ethos), thought

(*dianoia*), word/ speech (*lexis*), music/song (*melos*), and spectacle (*opsis*). All of them contribute to arouse the pity and fear in audiences which results into catharsis that was envisaged by Aristotle in tragedy.

Plot (Mythos)

For Aristotle, plot is the most important of the tragedy elements. He identifies it as the soul of a tragedy, stressing the fact that it is the sequence of events that defines the work. To be more precise, the plot of the narrative must be well-composed, meaning it has to be plotted and some of the things included are a clear background, buildup, climax, and conclusion. This structure helps in making the story to be properly structured, and well coordinated so that a layman or the intended audience can easily follow and understand the events or story being acted out.

Aristotle also lays down the rule that the plot must be organic, and that the events and occurrences in the play, all have to relate or be directly linked. Every process contributes to sustenance of audience engagement and interest in the events that are being portrayed on screen. Also, a good plot should contain reversal (*peripeteia*) and recognition (*anagnorisis*). The concept of reversal refers to a dramatic shift of fortune in the protagonist's life while the term recognition is associated with the main character attaining a moment of enlightenment on an important truth, usually concerning his or her existence or conduct. It would bring an enhancement of the affective aspect of the tragedy and the focus on the action leading to the play's climax.

Character (Ethos)

However, to centre it Aristotle also pays a lot of attention to character in a tragedy despite the fact that plot comes first. The main character must be a nobleman or a person of high rank, who has *hamartia*, a fatal character defect that causes his/her downfall. This is not always a sin, though; it might be a mistake or an ignorance on the party of the defector. The catastrophe depicted in the play can be linked with the *hamartia* of the protagonist that arouses both emotions including pity and fear in the spectators while observing the tragic audience of the high-born individual.

Aristotle was keen to point out that the protagonist must be as far as possible ordinary and create the audience's sympathy and compassion even though they is not perfectly good. The character's development and pain are relatable to the audience and in this way viewers can see the fragments of themselves and their errors. This link is therefore vital in engendering the catharsis because it provides the much-needed release of emotion through the main character's ill fate.

Thought (Dianoia)

The notion is about information connected with the issue of the tragedy, the arguments that can be observed in the play, and the philosophical substratum of its narrative. According to Aristotle, what makes a tragedy special is that it should deal with big issues of ethics and morality and engage the audience's reason in addition to their feelings. The themes usually pertain to such aspects as fate, justice, humans and their place in the world, and the fickleness or anger of the gods due to pride.

The cognitive part of a tragedy is mainly expressed through the speeches and performances of the actions of the tragedy's characters and the utterances of the chorus, which can comment on the play and its topics. Thus, while reaching the viewer at simpler levels of analysis, the films also make the viewers more aware of the multilevel aspects of human existence and the environment.

Diction (Lexis)

Use of language is yet another ingredient of Aristotelian tragedy, also known as diction. That is the reason why the vocabularies that are used in a tragedy should be fitting to the characters as well as the circumstances in which they are placed. The deceased is defended as belonging to the better kind of people and therefore their public speech must use high, even poetic, language which only enhances the topic under discussion.

Still, the issue of the tragedy is related to the cures of diction because it improves the intensity and depth of the characters' insights and feelings. This relates to external elements of the work, particularly the lexical and phrasal choice, distribution of speech rhythm, and employment of such stylistic devices as metaphors, imagery etc.

Song (Melos)

When covering aspects of the tragedy that Aristotle considers compulsory, the philosopher deems song or music as essentials in tragedy. Thus, the chorus speaks the lines in between and comments on the action, enunciates the collective agit which characterizes the society and intensifies the dramatic experience. The elements of musical accentuation work to improve the beauty and convey the emotions of the tragedy.

The chorus plays an active role of intervening in the events involving the characters while equally delivering a commentary to the audience, which enhances the audience's understanding of what is being enacted and its implications. Naturally the narration by song enhances the level of tragedy and brings the audience closer to the events presented.

Spectacle (Opsis)

Although the aspect of spectacle, the visually appealing parts of a play, are the lowest according to the aristotelian theatre elements it nonetheless impacts what appeals to the people. The setting, the costumes, and even the stage effects enhance the tragedy and, in general, are instrumental in enriching the spectators' visual perception of the play along with the essential focus on the plot and the themes.

In terms of the analysis of Aristotle's Poetics, the account of spectacle should not detract from the other features of tragedy but should rather complement them, proposing an appropriate setting in

which the overall drama is to take place. In the right measure, spectacle makes a degree of augmenting the feeling of the spectators, thus engaging them more into the play's reality.

Catharsis: The Purging of Emotions

Perhaps the most important and unique ideas in Aristotle's conception of tragedy are the ideas of purging. Catharsis is presented by Aristotle in "Poetics," as the goal of tragedy that elicits feelings of pity and fear, before eliminating them in the audience. The sort of 'emotional purging' that happens is one of the key aspects of the tragic experience and sets tragedy off from other forms of drama. Thus, reflections on catharsis imply a reconsideration of psychological, emotional, and ethical aspects related to individual audience members as well as the benefit or harm it may bring to society in general.

The structural characteristics of catharsis that are significant for the determination of the direction of emotions are as follows:

Catharsis is closely related to the feelings of pity and fear which are defined by Aristotle as the main and the most effective feelings that are stirred by tragedy. Whereas empathy is experienced when one identifies with another's pain that he or she must endure, there is an expression of fear knowing that such hardship can always be one's lot. These are emotions that are truly natural in tragic situations that the leading character of the drama goes through and in many cases, is a man of high rank fallen to his tragedy either by fate or personal folly.

As far as the appeal to passions is concerned, Aristotle states that the audience is purged of these strong emotions by the process of catharsis. This is not only a fleeting discharge of emotions but rather, an exhilarating conversion. Thus, exposing the audience to the abovementioned patterns of tragic experience and establishing an affective connection with the story, the audience goes through a process of vicissitude for the sake of solution. Thus, the tragedy's heightened emotionalism provides the viewer with the opportunity to examine their personal anxieties, which results in restoration and equilibrium on a psychological level.

Catharsis in Antiquity

There are a number of classical tragedies that illustrate catharsis. In Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, the hero's transition from ignorance to enlightenment and climaxing into the horrifying realization of his own actions, creates intense pity and fear. It is an experience of suffering by Oedipus we are shown and how fate keeps on unraveling itself making a way for a great release. Similarly, Euripides' Medea produces strong cathartic effects through the extreme emotions caused by her actions and tragic results that follow them as they lead us into grappling with intricate moral questions as well as emotional issues.

Modern Catharses

However, the concept of catharsis goes beyond ancient Greek tragedies and remains relevant to date in contemporary times. Many modern pieces of literature, theatre or films seem to provoke such feelings and provoke ethical reactions at the same time. For example, various present-day tragic plays irrespective of their forms and themes can engender cathartic states by demonstrating human struggles, illustrating moral dilemmas or indicating results of acts.

One good illustration is Arthur Miller's *Death of Salesman* which invokes pathos and terror through Willy Loman's gradual exposure before exploring tragedy in American dream (Miller 2009). The play has highly charged emotions plus intricate moral positions; this encourages a relieving effect within audiences urging.

Poetics by Aristotle has been one of the most significant work of Western literature and drama. This essay focuses on those essential components of tragedy that were examined by a Greek philosopher as well as playwrights, authors, and critics who still follow his insights into dramatic creation for centuries to come. It will probe this influence in classical literature, medieval literature, Renaissance literature, modernist literature and contemporary theories on drama and narrative.

Classical and Medieval Literature

Aristotle's principles on tragedy formed the basis for the works of many Greek dramatists such as Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles. These dramatists closely adhered to Aristotle's principles that centered around plot structure, character development and theme exploration thus giving rise to some of the best examples of tragedies in western dramas.

During Middle Ages these concepts were preserved through Islamic as well as Christian scholars' writings. In particular Averroes' Commentaries on Aristotle revived Aristotelian thought in Europe paving way for the rebirth of classical literary tradition and theater during Renaissance.

Neo-Classical and Enlightenment Drama

The Neo-classical period of drama in France was characterized by high regard of Aristotle's classical idealism. Tragedies were made by Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine and other playwrights who strictly followed Aristotle's principles on unity of time, place, and action. Moreover, theatric conventions that emphasized rationality, order, and decorum in the neo-classical tragedy reflected upon Aristotle's influence on the drama during this period.

Enlightenment dramatists were still guided by Aristotelian ideas when they wrote about reason, morality and human nature. A lot of tragedies written at this time often centered on personal

responsibilities as well as intricacies involving moral choices thus evoking Aristotle's concerns with the ethical aspects of tragedy.

Modern and Contemporary Drama

Even in modern and contemporary drama Aristotelian tragedy has continued to be influential as some playwrights have used its principles to make their works more emotional while engaging audiences intellectually through cinematic techniques. The ultimate goal here is creating effective tragic plays that revolve around character development, plot structure, thematic exploration among others.

Implication on Theory and Criticism in drama

Drama theory and criticism are still pervaded by the ideas in Aristotle's Poetics, which is a foundational text. Aristotle's principles are still used by scholars and critics to analyze and interpret dramatic works as they investigate whether they conform to or deviate from classical standards. The concepts of mimesis, catharsis and essential elements of tragedy when used together helps us understand how dramatic narratives are put together and their effects.

On one hand, many contemporary theories of drama, including those of Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, and Augusto Boal expressly reference Aristotelianism either through adherence or opposition. For instance, Brecht's epic theatre questions the concept of catharsis because it seeks to generate thinking that is critical rather than emotional release. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty looks at traditional Aristotelian tragedy as something different that can evoke the emotions and senses in a way other than what we know. Finally, Boal believes in Theater for Change where he argues that it has the transformative power necessary for social justice since it builds on Aristotle's ideas of Democracy as well as some ethical considerations such as accountability given its participatory nature.

Aristotle and Shakespeare Tragedy

Shakespeare captures several of Aristotle's key elements in his tragedies, albeit with some departures and due to the fact that Shakespeare does not replicate Aristotelian principles directly.

"Hamlet"

Shakespeare delves into themes of revenge, madness and mortality in Hamlet. It specifies the story of Prince Hamlet who wanted revenge due to his father's death brought upon by none other than his uncle, King Claudius. The content of the play is that with its complex sub plots and philosophical declamations, while all these from against aristoliteian unity action. But the story of Hamlet still holds together and he remains a compelling character.

This leads to the deaths of many characters, most notably himself due him being excessively indecisive and contemplative. In the play pity and fear are aroused by revealing Hamlet's interior self (through his soliloquies) absorbing all before him, and then launching itself on a series of external physical actions in which arrive at their climax only through death. This is why he achieved the cathartic effect of

"Macbeth"

We can see the Aristotelian configuration of another Shakespearean tragedy, Macbeth. The story revolves around Macbeth escaping from tyranny to madness caused first by ambition fed in prophecies of the ever-scheming witches. This is a unity of action whereby the narrative follows Macbeth, noble warrior to despotic ruler

Due to his tragic flaw, the vaulting ambition which makes Macbeth forget both moral and psychological balances leading him forth towards dark abyss. Fate, guilt and power... draw the audience into a world of pity & fear. The catharsis occurs as Macbeth meets his tragic ending, and finally faces the repercussions of what he has done.

Conclusion

Aristotelian tragedy, found in the Poetics of Aristotle, remains a guiding principle for dramatic literature and theory around the world. These enduring principles — of plot structure, character development and thematic depth — along with the personal journey that ends in catharsis have served as a key to hooking audiences far back into history. The influence of Aristotle's insights is also immediately visible in the classical works of Sophocles and Euripides, as well as more recent tragedies penned by Shakespeare and modern plays written by Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams.

By pointing out that humans are moral and emotional beings, slain everyday by the simplistic forces of life (a little illness here - a great emergency there) mumblings about evolution. Aristotle's principles continue to be used in contemporary theater, film and literary criticism but these positions are being taken with more deliberation. Aristotelian tragedy evolves as more scholars and creators explore -and perhaps reimagine-these guidelines, yet what is educated from this form remains an enduring beacon to the myriad contradictions of human nature & the power that stories have inspired since our inception.

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