

ARISTOTLE'S POETICS (330 B.C.)

Poetics is the first extant essay on art that is explanatory, in which art is viewed in terms of its effect.

Aristotle's definition of tragedy: Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in a dramatic form, with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish catharsis of such emotions. The objective of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear. Such incidents will allow the spectators to be purged or purified of such emotions by 'catharsis' (a purification).

It is an imitation, not of men, but of action and life, and life consists of action.

Purpose: A tragedians objective is o move us with meaningful experience of human beings with whom we can identify ourselves to the extent of suffering with them.

I. Aristotelian Concept of a play

A play must:

- 1) Have a beginning, middle and end.
- 2) Must be purposeful-to evoke laughter, sorrow, pity, fear, and the characters must be in keeping with the purpose.
- 3) Avoid monotony, it must be varied.
- 4) Should engage and maintain the interest;
 - Characters must arouse curiosity
 - The situation must be compelling
 - Issues must be vital
 - Visual effects should be novel
- 5) The actions must be probable, even if it deals with an event that is not true.

II. According to Aristotle concept of a play, the structure is approached through:

1) Plot

- Composed of 'exposition', 'complication', 'crisis', 'resolution'
- Imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude.
- It must have an orderly arrangement of parts: beginning, a middle, and end (and nothing after).
- The sequence of events is a change from good fortune to bad. Aristotle does not insist that all tragedies must end in disaster. Instead, he indicates that a catastrophic ending as the 'perfect' and proper one for tragedy.
- The length must be one that can be easily embraced by memory.
- Must keep to real names, for credibility.
- Must be confined to a single day, and have one setting (unity of time and place).

2) Character

- There is one kind of drama- a character's downfall.
- Tragedy must concern itself with a character well above the common level, so that the audience is emotionally shattered and purified by this experience.
- Since the object of imitation are men in action, and these men must be of a higher type. It follows that we must represent men either as better, or worse than in real life.
- The characters must be true to life (yet more beautiful), consistent, appropriate (e.g. cleverness is inappropriate in women (according to Aristotle!))

TRAGIC HERO: A man not pre-eminently virtuous or just, whose misfortune is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment.

3) Diction (must suit the theme): Show what is a command, a prayer, a statement, a threat, a question, and answer etc.

4) Thought (theme, argument and overall meaning of facts): Every effect has to be produced by speech (e.g. excitation of the feeling, such as pity, fear, anger and the like.)

5) Spectacle and visual elements

6) Melody/Music (music and the speech activity tone pitch)

Function of the CHORUS in Greek Drama

1. They were a character in the play, usually townspeople. This character was sympathetic to the protagonist.
2. They presented the writer's point of view.
3. They were the ideal spectator (audience), their reaction to a scene would cue the audience on how they should react. They took part and commented, gave advice, narrated actions.
4. They broke the drama into dramatic scenes (or episodes), each scene was separated from the next by a choral interlude (or ode)

GREEK DRAMA

GREEK TRAGEDY	ROMAN TRAGEDY
<p>Structure of Greek Tragedy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Late point of attack 2. Violence and death off stage (such events expressed, forwarded by the chorus or messengers, characters) 3. Frequent use of messengers to relate information 4. Usually continuous time of action (24 hours) 5. Usually a single place (or different parts of a single place such as a palace) 6. Stories based on myth or history, but varied interpretations of events 7. Focus on psychological and ethical attributes of characters, rather than physical and sociological. <p>Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) <i>Orestia</i> Euripudes (480-406 B.C.) <i>Medea</i> Sophocles (495-406 B.C.) <i>Oedipus Rex</i></p>	<p>Seneca (4 BC-65 AD)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His plays were based on Greek plays. • Probably written for private reading (closet drama) • Seneca is important in terms of English Drama because Renaissance (1550-1700) playwrights such as Shakespeare used his tragedies as their primary model. <p>Characteristics of Seneca's drama</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He divided his plays into 5 acts with choral interludes. The interludes were not part of the play's action. 2. There are elaborate rhetorical speeches -the characters debate instead of conversing. 3. As a 'moral philosopher', he believed that drama should preach a moral lesson. 4. Involved violent action: filled with deeds of horror (children killed, murder, torture) (revenge tragedy, ghosts, deranged hero who seeks vengeance) 5. Respected the unity of time (24 hours) and place (action unfolds at one location) 6. Each character is dominated by one passion (love, revenge, ambition) which brings about their downfall. <p>Example: <i>Medea</i></p>

The Three Unities in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex

Three Unities in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex

Unity of Time: A single day (12 or 24 hours).

Unity of Place (setting): The tragedy takes place in the Royal House of Thebes. Even when the action takes place inside the palace such as Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-blinding, there is no shift in scene. Instead, the interior actions are described in a speech delivered by a Messenger:

Messenger: The Queen is Dead.

Leader (of the Chorus): Poor lady-how?

Messenger: By her own hand. But you are spared the worst,
you never had to watch...I saw it all,
and with all the memory that's in me
you will learn what that poor woman suffered.

Once she's broken in through the gates,
dashing past us, frantic, whipped to fury,
ripping her hair out with both hands-

[...]

Oh how she wept, mourning the marriage-bed
Where she let loose that double brood-monsters-
Husband by husband, children by her child.

And then-

But how she died is more than I can say. Suddenly
Oedipus burst in, screaming, he stunned us so

[...]

crashed through the chambers.

And there he saw we saw the woman hanging by the neck,

[...]

he digs them down the sockets of his eyes, crying, "You,
you'll see no more the pain I suffered, all the pain I caused!" (Sophocles, Lines 1363-1406)

The messenger's speech eliminates the need for scene changes, due to the limited resources of the ancient theatre, would have been difficult and awkward.

Unity of Action:

- The plot is based on the myth of Oedipus, but does not include any sub-plots (or the irrational parts of the myth such as e.g. why did Laius and Jocasta not kill the baby? If Oedipus was afraid of marrying his mother, why did he marry a woman old enough to be his mother?). Instead, the play investigates the past -Oedipus begins to investigate the murder of Laius (all the irrational things have been already done).
- The incidents have a cause-and-effect relationship.

Cause: The plague in Thebes

Effect: prompts Oedipus to send Creon to consult the oracle of Delphi

Cause: The oracle's reply that the murderer of Laius must be banished from Thebes

Effect: prompts Oedipus pronounce a solemn curse on the murderer and to send for Teiresias.

Cause: Teiresias states that Oedipus is the murderer,

Effect: (but since the king knows himself to be innocent-or think he knows) he accuses Creon of plotting with Teiresias against him.

Cause: The quarrel of Oedipus and Creon

Effect: brings Jocasta from the house.

Cause: Seeking to calm down her husband and prove that oracles cannot be trusted, she tells again how Laius died, mentioning that he was killed "at a place where three roads meet"

Effect: Oedipus suddenly begins to suspect that he may indeed have killed the king without knowing who he was.

Cause: To settle the matter

Effect: they send for the Herdsman who is the only survivor of that attack.

(meanwhile a messenger arrives from Corinth to inform Oedipus that his supposed father, King Polybus of Corinth, has died)* [The arrival of the Messenger is the only action in the play that is not directly caused by a previous action. However, this is a perfect example of Aristotle's contention that if coincidences cannot be avoided, they should have "an air of design" for this messenger seems to be brought by fate, since he is the missing link in Oedipus's story, the very man who received Oedipus as a baby from the Herdsman]

Cause: When Oedipus rejoices that he did not kill his father as the oracle had prophesied but is still worried that he may marry his mother

Effect: the Messenger, seeking to relieve him of his fear, innocently tells him that Polybus and Merope were not his real parents. Thus, when the Herdsman arrives and they tell their respective stories, the whole truth emerges. This is the climax, or turning point of the plot- the truth about Oedipus leads directly to the suicide of Jocasta and Oedipus' self-blinding and request to be exiled. The departure of Oedipus from Thebes will lift the plague, thus resolving the problem that started off the chain of events and concluding the plot.