

Central Ideas on Tragedy from Aristotle's Poetics

TRAGEDY confines its action to one day (Oedipus)

Definition: an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language that is ornate.

Actions in tragedy spring from thought and character (quality)

Plot of tragedy is the imitation of the action, the arrangements of the incidents. (see plot structure)

Every tragedy must have six components:

Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Song.

Structure is the most important of tragedy because it is the imitation of life.

A well-structured plot has a beginning, middle and end. There should be some sort of causal necessity leading from the beginning to the end; the end is a complete resolution and has nothing that follows it.

Unity of plot does not consist of unity of the hero. The various incidents of a man's life cannot be reduced to a unity, and too there are many actions of a man out of which we cannot make one action.

Tragedy is an imitation of events terrible and pitiful. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect.

Plots are either simple or complex. In the simple plot the change of fortune takes place without Reversal of Intention and without Recognition. In a complex plot, it is accompanied by Reversal or Recognition. A complex plot is more artistically satisfying.

Reversal of intention is a change by which the action veers round to its opposite. For example, in Oedipus the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus but produces the opposite effect.

Recognition is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. (Oedipus)

A third part of plot is the tragic incident which is a destructive or painful action (Oedipus' stabbing his eyes, Jocasta's hanging)

The successful tragic plot is that of a man who is not eminently good or bad yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error of frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous.

The tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another. (son killing father)

The plot of every tragedy falls into two parts --Complication (Rising Action) and Unravelling (Falling Action)

Tragedy deals with the element of evil which is destructive to human life and values, an element which we fear to face. Pity comes from our ability to sympathize with the tragic figure.

KATHARSIS: purging of fear and pity, purifying the emotions

Tragedy is state of healing, a healing of evil brought into the tragic hero's life. Even though the tragic hero's life ends horribly, our feelings (readers) are lifted to a state of harmonized serenity or tranquility. a sense of harmony develops.