

Core 312 Forms of Literature :Tragedy

UNIT 1

01. Introduction, Definitions and Characteristics of Tragedy as a Form Of Literature

(1) Introduction:

Tragedy (from the Greek: τραγωδία, tragōidia) is a genre of drama based on human suffering and, mainly, the terrible or sorrowful events that befall a main character. Traditionally, the intention of tragedy is to invoke an accompanying catharsis, or a “pain [that] awakens pleasure,” for the audience.

Who introduced tragedy?

The Greeks of Attica, the ancient state whose chief city was Athens, first used the word in the 5th century BCE to describe a specific kind of play, which was presented at festivals in Greece.

Aeschylus was an ancient Greek tragedian, and is often described as the ***father of tragedy.***

Christopher Marlowe, known as the Father of English Tragedy, was a brilliant playwright and poet who had a significant impact on the development of English literature during the late 16th century.

The word "tragedy" comes from the Greek "he-goat" and aeidein = "to sing" – literally, "the song of a goat." Scholars aren't sure exactly why, but they have a couple theories.

"*Gorboduc" or "Ferrex and Porrex" is considered to be the first tragedy in English literature* as it follows the traditional structure of a Greek tragedy. It is a play written in five acts that adhere to the classical unities of time, place, and action.

Structure of Tragedy:

A Shakespearean tragedy traditionally follows the Freytag pyramid of Dramatic structure which consists of five parts. **The five parts are: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action and Denouement.**

Tragedies such as ***Oedipus Rex, Hamlet, Julius Caesar, and Romeo and Juliet*** all have these central noble figures who possess tragic flaws and suffer as a result.

Aristotle defined three key elements which make a tragedy: hamartia, anagnorisis, and peripeteia. Hamartia is a hero's tragic flaw; the aspect of the character which ultimately leads to their downfall.

There are **four distinct kinds of tragedy**, and the poet should aim at bringing out all the important parts of the kind he chooses. **First, there is the complex tragedy, made up of peripeteia and anagnorisis; second, the tragedy of suffering; third, the tragedy of character; and fourth, the tragedy of spectacle.**

(2) Definitions of Tragedy:

Basically **_Tragedy is a very sad event or situation, especially one that involves death & also a serious play that has a sad ending._**

1.* According to Aristotle:

”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 parts are being found in the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation or catharsis of these emotions.”

2.* In ancient Greece,

”Tragedy was a ritual performance of the downfall of a great man – usually a king or a nobleman – brought low because of some sort of fault.”

3.* In the medieval period, “tragedy” was concerned with “noble or illustrious men,” too, but these tales usually took on a Christian moral valence.

4.* Sophocles* defines tragedy as an *_”Artistic imitation of an action that is serious, complete in itself, and of adequate magnitude.”_

5. ***Tragedy in literature*** is defined as,

“a genre that focuses around a noble character who struggles against strong external challenges.” _ *

6. From his essay on Natural Law on, **Hegel** conceives tragedy as ***“a conflict within a social order, which he calls ethical life (Sittlichkeit).”*** _ *

7. _ ***Tragedy, a branch of drama that treats in a serious and dignified style the sorrowful or terrible events encountered or caused by a heroic individual.*** _ *

****03. Main Characteristics of Tragedy:****

How will you identify if a play is a comedy or a tragedy? There are certain specific characteristics that tragedies share.

They are:

*1. Tragic Hero:*

Central to the tragedy is the fall of a great man or woman-the tragic hero, who is a person of noble birth but has a flaw in his character that eventually leads to his downfall. For Example, Antigone is the

daughter of Oedipus, former king of Thebes. Although she is admirable in performing her duty, she is also stubborn and uncompromising.

***_ *2. Tragic Flaw:** _**

The tragic hero's downfall is because of fault within his or her character-tragic flaw-which leads him to his tragic end. For example, the tragic flaw in Hamlet is hesitation and his brooding nature, and in Lear, his excessive pride.

**** 3. Supernatural Elements:** _**

External forces such as ghosts and witches may influence the actions of a character and cause his downfall. These supernatural beings certainly in most cases are not to be taken as mere illusions; they are distinctly conceived as having a real existence outside the sphere of hallucination. For example, the ghost in Hamlet is not seen by the prince alone. Similarly in Macbeth, it is not only Macbeth himself who sees the witches; they even appear with their queen, Hecate.

***_ *4. Conflict:** _**

Any tragedy cannot be complete without conflict. The conflict can be with the country, the society, or within the character himself. This conflict moves a character to an action that is disastrous.

***_ *5. Revenge:** _**

Most tragedies contain this element of revenge. Either the hero is vengeful or he is being avenged.

***_ *6. Sad Ending:** _**

The outcome must always be sad, a downfall, death, or separation or alienation.

***_ *7. Comic Relief:** _**

Many tragedies have humorous scenes, incident, or speech that are light to relieve us of the stress of the tragic events. This allows audience time to prepare for the next intense event.

****_8. Main Character is Isolated:****

The focus is usually on the main character who is going to be struck by the tragedy.

_____ ##+##++##+## _____

****OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAGEDY:****

_(1) Simplicity:*

Tragic heroes tend to approach problems and situations in as fairly straight- forward manner. Life can be understood in simple binaries – good/bad; just/unjust; beautiful/ugly.

_(2) Low Tolerance for Disorder:*

Tragic plots tend to stress order and process – the end follows from the beginning.

_(3) Preference for the Familiar:*

Tragic heroes and plots have “a low tolerance for cognitive dissonance.” The violation of the norm is what brings about a tragic fall.

_(4) Low Tolerance for Ambiguity:*

In tragedy, things should have one meaning and have a clear-cut application to problems.

_(5) Convergent Thinking: _

Tragedy stresses what is past and what is real. It tends to be more information-gathering based, wanting to find and resolve nagging problems.

_(6) Uncritical Thinking: _

Tragedy tends not to call into question the accepted order of things. To do so is to suffer the consequences.

_(7) Emotional Engagement: _

Tragic heroes tend to respond with strong, overpowering emotions—pride, lust, grief, rage. This often results in extremist attitudes and reactions. In the same way, the audience is expected to respond with cathartic involvement.

_(8) Stubbornness: _

Tragic heroes tend to stick with a course of action and follow it to their doom. They are firm and committed.

_(9) Idealistic:*

The tragic vision longs for a clear-cut world driven by principle. It tends to value ethical abstractions, such as Truth, Justice, and Beauty

_(10) Finality:*

Tragic actions lead to inevitable consequences.

_(11) Spirit:*

The tragic vision tends to value the human spirit. It can often be dualistic, prizing the spirit/soul above the body. Tragic heroes often long for some higher, greater level of life than common human existence.

_(12) Seriousness:*

The tragic vision takes its characters and plots seriously. They are treated as important and make demands upon us.

#####