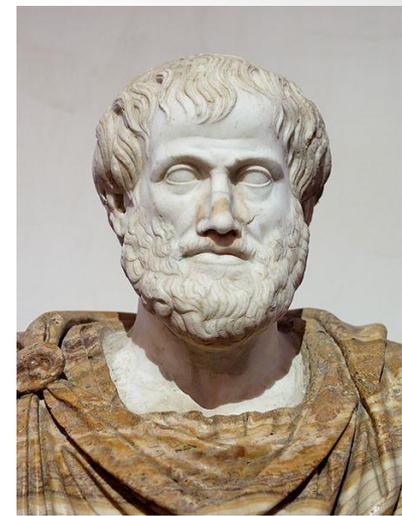


History of Tragedy

English 3

Tragedy3 Unit

Aristotle



- **384 BCE – 322 BCE**
 - **BCE = Before the Common Era**
 - **International classification system based on time, not religion.**
 - **CE = Common Era**
 - **(AD = Anno Domini = “in the year of our Lord”)**
- **Greek Philosopher**
- **Wrote *Poetics*, an ancient text discussing tragedy, what tragedy is, and what tragedy provides for citizens.**
- **There are “Elements of Tragedy” which are like rules. Shakespeare followed these rules.**

Tragedy

- A form of art (literature, drama) that provides audiences the opportunity to
 - Relate to the characters
 - Feel empathy
- Experience **CATHARSIS**
 - An emotional cleansing
 - His theory: if citizens feel extreme sadness through experiencing tragedy by living vicariously through the tragic situations affecting the main character, they will cleanse themselves of the negative emotions they carry around and therefore be better citizens/people in their community.
 - Example: how we feel after a really good cry or after punching a pillow

The Tragic Hero

- In tragedies, there is a tragic hero.
- This is the person we are rooting for.
- They are not a “hero” in the “fireman rescuing a baby from a burning building” sense.
- They are the main character who is involved in the tragedy and who the audience feels empathy with and sympathy for.
- They experience a “fall from grace” because of decisions they make.
- We can identify with those decisions, even though we know they are wrong or dangerous.

Elements of Tragedy

- Applied to *Romeo and Juliet*
Tragic Hero: Romeo
- Applied to *Hamlet*
Tragic Hero: Hamlet

Rule #1: The problem involves someone of considerable rank. (A person of less importance is not considered tragic in the classical sense; his fall will not influence a great number of people.)

- Romeo is the son of the famous, powerful, and wealthy Montague family.
- Hamlet is the prince of Denmark.

Rule #2: The fall of the hero must affect many people.

- When Romeo fell from grace (was exiled and died), the entire city of Verona grieved.
- Hamlet is the prince of a country.

Rule #3: Things go well up to a certain point. (This point need not lie within the span of the work.)

- Romeo and Juliet got married, and were going to live happily ever after!
- Hamlet was a happy prince until his father was murdered.

Rule #4: There must be exceptional suffering directly in connection with the hero.

- Juliet died too; both families were devastated.
- In *Hamlet*, everyone died.

Rule #5: The person's character directly influences the tragedy. It is because the hero is who he is that the tragic events follow.

- Romeo was a Montague. Had he been from a different family, there would be no conflict.
- Hamlet was the son of the murdered king.

Rule #6: The characteristic of the hero that results in the tragic events must be respectable. (This characteristic is often called a “tragic flaw”; however, the flaw may, in fact, be a virtue, thus adding to the tragedy of the situation.)

- Romeo was impulsive. He fell in love quickly, and acted without thinking. We love love, and we understand his infatuation, his horror at losing his love, and why he acted the way he did.
- Hamlet wanted to avenge his father’s death. We get this. We would want revenge, too. Nobody should get away with murder like Claudius did. We understand why Hamlet acted the way he did.

Rule #7: Tragic Events occur which are outside of the control of all of the persons involved.

- Romeo was exiled. But, had he gotten the note from the Friar explaining what was going on, he would have known that Juliet wasn't dead. Oops. Also, Tybalt and Mercutio's deaths were outside of the control of Romeo. He got sucked into this fight.
- Hamlet accidentally killed Polonius. Ophelia killed herself. Gertrude drank the poison. Hamlet couldn't have predicted or controlled any of these tragic events.

Rule #8: There is a degree of inevitability in the tragedy. In spite of circumstances in which the chain of action might be broken, thus preventing tragedy, it marches on toward the conclusion.

- If Romeo would have gotten the note. If Mercutio and Tybalt would have kept their mouths closed. If Juliet's dad would have held off on insisting that Juliet marry Paris, etc. But the chain of action was never broken.
- If Hamlet would have realized Polonius was the one hiding in Gertrude's room. If Hamlet and Ophelia had had an honest conversation. If Hamlet would have killed Claudius when he was praying, etc. But the chain of action was never broken.

Rule #9: The tragedy occurs because the character is influenced by the surroundings and the action and/or because the surroundings and action are influenced by the character.

- Romeo is influenced by the conflict between the families, by his friends, by the advice/"help" from the Friar...Romeo is influencing Juliet, Mercutio, and his family; his actions create the entire final scene.
- Hamlet is influenced by his father, his mom, his uncle, Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, etc. Hamlet's actions influence Ophelia and Laertes, and his actions set up the final sequence where everyone dies.

Additional aspects that may occur:

a) There may be abnormal conditions of character

- Romeo seems pretty “normal teenager.” This one doesn’t apply.
- Hamlet sees/talks to the ghost of his father. That’s a little strange.

Additional aspects that may occur:

b) There may be an element of the supernatural

- Nope. Not really. Unless you count the drug that makes everyone think Juliet is dead...
- Ummm...ghost of King Hamlet. Definite weirdness.

Additional aspects that may occur:

c) There is both an inner and outer conflict.

- Romeo:
 - Internal: I love her! I love my family!
 - External: Capulets vs. Montagues; Paris wanting to marry Juliet
- Hamlet:
 - Internal: “To be or not to be, that is the question...”
 - External: His mom married his uncle. His uncle killed his dad.

Elements of Tragedy

- Applied to *Death of a Salesman*
 - **Willy Loman is the tragic hero.**
 - He is the character we are supposed to root for, feel sympathy for, feel empathy with.
 - His death creates sadness and catharsis within us.

Rule #1: The problem involves someone of considerable rank. (A person of less importance is not considered tragic in the classical sense; his fall will not influence a great number of people.)

- Arthur Miller broke this rule!
- He said, “Willy Loman is the American Everyman and his tragedy is that of the “little man” caught in the terrifying pressures of everyday life.”
- He said, “Tragedy makes us aware of what the character might have been. Tragedy, therefore, is inseparable from a certain modest hope regarding the human animal.”
- He said, “Tragedy arises when you are in the presence of a man who has missed accomplishing his joy. But the joy must be there, the promise of the right way of life must be there...tragedy...is the most perfect means of showing us who and what we are, and what we must be—or strive to become.”

Rule #2: The fall of the hero must affect many people.

- Willy Loman's death, according to Arthur Miller, would affect the entire audience. We feel for him. He makes us uncomfortable and sad.

Rule #3: Things go well up to a certain point. (This point need not lie within the span of the work.)

- According to Willy Loman's memories, things were going really well when the boys were in high school. Yes, there were some issues there, which we see and he doesn't really acknowledge. But he was happy, and the boys were happy. At that moment in his life, he had possibility and hope. He saw success in his future.

Rule #4: There must be exceptional suffering directly in connection with the hero.

- Willy suffers extraordinarily. He is tormented. Because of his torment, his wife and his older son are in pain.

Rule #5: The person's character directly influences the tragedy. It is because the hero is who he is that the tragic events follow.

- Willy was a “low man,” a little guy. If he had been successful, or had a better upbringing with role models, he wouldn't have been in this position. But he's just a little guy in a big world.

Rule #6: The characteristic of the hero that results in the tragic events must be respectable. (This characteristic is often called a “tragic flaw”; however, the flaw may, in fact, be a virtue, thus adding to the tragedy of the situation.)

- Willy Loman believed in the American Dream. He believed that you could be successful by being well-liked, popular, attractive, and charismatic. We get this...we kind of believe it, too. Willy Loman should have “settled” for a different career. But he wanted a business career. We want to “shoot for the stars”, to “be all that we can be.” This is the American way of life.

Rule #7: Tragic Events occur which are outside of the control of all of the persons involved.

- Willy is exhausted and suffering through...dementia? Hallucinations?
- Willy was put on commission, and then eventually fired.
- Biff walked in on Willy in Boston.

Rule #8: There is a degree of inevitability in the tragedy. In spite of circumstances in which the chain of action might be broken, thus preventing tragedy, it marches on toward the conclusion.

- The world is changing for Willy. Even if he was still known, the way sales are done is different. He's old school.
- He's getting older. He's not going to be able to drive as far, work as many hours, and be gone as long.
- The apartment buildings around Willy's house are creeping in on him, showing the inevitability of his becoming obsolete.

Rule #9: The tragedy occurs because the character is influenced by the surroundings and the action and/or because the surroundings and action are influenced by the character.

- Willy is influenced by the changing world around him, and by his lack of role models.
- Willy influences Biff and Happy in their life choices.

Additional aspects that may occur:

a) There may be abnormal conditions of character

- Willy is beginning to lose it. We won't diagnose him, but he is definitely suffering with mental issues.

Additional aspects that may occur:

b) There may be an element of the supernatural

- Not really. Some people might say Ben, but Ben isn't really there. He's not a ghost, he's just a memory.

Additional aspects that may occur:

c) There is both an inner and outer conflict.

- Willy is very conflicted internally. He feels incredibly guilty about the affair, he blames himself for Biff's lack of success, and he judges himself against the only other men he "sees": Ben, Charley, and Howard.
- Willy has a huge conflict with Biff. He thinks Biff has ruined his own life to spite Willy, to get back at him. Both Willy and Biff feel like they're not good enough for each other, like they've let each other down.

Willy Loman is a tragic hero, in the Aristotelian sense. He has a tragic flaw that we can understand. We can relate to him, and we sympathize with him. He frustrates us, but we can also see ourselves in his mistakes and in his hopes and dreams.