

Constituent elements of Tragedy:

Aristotle's famous study of Greek dramatic art in the "Poetics" compares tragedy to other metrical forms as comedy and epic. He determines that tragedy, like all poetry, is a kind of imitation or mimesis, but there is a serious purpose behind it, and it uses direct action rather than narrative to achieve its ends. He says that poetic mimesis is an imitation of things as they could be, not as they are – of universals and ideals- thus it is more philosophical and exalted medium than history. He considers it the highest poetic form.

Aristotle defines tragedy as

"An imitation [mimesis] of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude...through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions."

The function of tragedy is to bring "catharsis" to the audience by arousing the sensations of pity and fear, and to purge these emotions. According to Aristotle, **tragedy has six main elements: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and Melody**. Out of these elements, character, spectacle and Melody are external and the others are internal constituents.

1.Plot:

Plot is the most important constituent of tragedy. It serves as soul and life of a tragedy. It is the combination or structure of the events of a story. Plot is the end and purpose of the tragedy and not just a means to another end. According to Aristotle,

"Plot is the underlying principle of a tragedy".

Tragedy, in its essence, is a story and this purpose is filled through plot. The outcomes are driven by the laws of necessity and possibility. Aristotle describes that **plot must be a complete whole**. By `complete` he means that the plot must have a proper beginning, middle and end. The plot should be of a certain magnitude because beauty depends on magnitude and order. Plot requires a single central theme.

The **appearance of design** is further important for the arousal of the emotions of pity and fear in tragedy. Pity and fear arouse best if the incidents occur unexpectedly and because of one another. Aristotle explains how the plot must have unity for it to be a good plot. The plot must have the unity of action or be a unified whole. Without unity a plot can be just a jumble of different ideas thrown together which do not make much sense.

Aristotle distinguishes between **two kinds of plot**. Firstly, there is the simple plot. The simple plot is defined as a unified construct of necessary and probable actions accompanied by a change of fortune. The hero's fortune passes from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misery, in a direct manner. The second one is the complex plot. The complex plot is defined as one

where the change of fortune is accompanied by a reversal of fortune, recognition, or both. Complex plots involve Peripety, Discovery, or both.

Aristotle gives the most concise description of the formal structure of tragedy. **There are four Quantitative Elements of Tragedy**- the different parts of performance. These are Prologue, Episode, Exode and a Choral portion, which distinguished into three sections, Parode, Stasimon and Commas. The Prologue is the part preceding the entrance of the chorus and it comes in between two whole choral songs. An Episode is a part in which one or more actors take part, to announce something to the chorus. The Exode is that entire part of a tragedy which has no choric song after it. In the Choral portion, the Parode is the song which the chorus sings as it enters. It is the first statement of the Chorus. A Stasimon is a song of the chorus without anapests (unstressed syllables followed by one long or stressed syllable.) or trochees (consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one) these are sung in the orchestra 'standing in one place'. A Commas is a joint lamentation song sung by chorus and actors.

Aristotle says that if the poet borrows the story from myth or tradition or invents names himself, the poet is a 'maker'. He is a maker of plots do not verse. The poet makes his own plots even if he borrows the story. Thus, Aristotle condemns the 'episodic' plots, in which there are number of episodes which are not related to one. In other words, episodic plot would not have the unity which is so essential to tragedy. Thus, he calls plot, "the life and soul" of tragedy. Aristotle says that,

"There can be a tragedy without character but there can be no tragedy without plot".

The tragic emotions of pity and fear should arise from plot rather than the spectacle:

When it comes to distinguishing one good artist from another, then the difference comes in the construction of plot, and how the plot alone can instigate the emotions of pity and fear in the audience. For example, in Oedipus the plot can arouse emotions of pity and fear and allow the catharsis of emotions without any additional need for the spectacle. The spectacle is indeed an external element of tragedy and hence not as important as plot. When some poets use spectacle alone to incite the emotions of pity and fear then such a tragedy is empty of the true essence of what makes a tragedy.

Tragic situations arousing pity and fear:

The causes of pity and fear are important to be included in the play, because the intensity of the emotions of pity and fear depends on the situation. Certain kinds of situations allow greater pity and fear, while others only allow a weak emotional awakening.

Situations that do not allow great emotional catharsis are:

- Violent action taken against an enemy
- When the people involved are indifferent to one another

Situations that allow greater emotional catharsis are:

- Violent action taken against a friend
- Violent action or deed is committed against a family member
- Relationship is discovered when the disaster is just about to be carried out and a misdeed is prevented
- Relationship is discovered after the deed is carried out and the disaster ensues

It is a common occurrence in Greek tragedy that the tragedy is restricted to only families and those with a small number of members. This is because the poets wanted to use discovery to create plot and plot twists. Hence Aristotle says that it was accident rather than art that led the poet to construct plots.

2.Character:

Character is the second important part of tragedy. Aristotle discusses four **essential parts of characterization**.

Tragic characters must be good. This means they can make good choices about their actions. Aristotle asks for a good man not a perfect man. Then, there should be appropriateness in characters. It means that character must be true to the status he belongs to. The good qualities of the hero must be appropriate to the character. For instance, war like qualities can be good but they would be inappropriate in a woman. A woman must be shown as womanly and not manly and vice versa.

The character must be true to life. One can identify oneself with the characters. If one does not see the characters as one sees oneself, the tragic emotions of pity and fear become irrelevant. Thus, a tragic character must be a normal person with which the reader can easily associate himself to the character.

The character must be consistent. The character must be seen as a whole and consistent with what he is presented as from beginning to the end. There must be probability or necessity in the character's actions and words. If the character is shown as being inconsistent one, he should be consistently inconsistent. Aristotle argues that the tragic hero must have a fatal flaw, Hamartia. This flaw does not make them bad people, but it is something that will cause them to fall from good fortune to bad fortune.

3.Thought:

Thought is the intellectual element in a tragedy, which is expressed through the characters. It is the "power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion". Thought is related to diction and plot in the sense that it's through diction that a thought can be expressed.

Thought is expressed by the words to prove or disapprove something, to minimize or maximize the effect of a thing by presenting it unimportant or significant respectively and to arouse the emotions of pity, fear anger and horror to convince the reader.

Similarly, thought can be expressed with the help of plot by arousing the emotions of fear, pity or horror entirely from the situation i.e. through nonverbal explanation of situation.

4.Diction and its various parts:

Aristotle is concerned less with written language and more with spoken language. Therefore, Aristotle takes the fundamental building block of language—as a unit of sound rather than as a single written character. Aristotle divides the Diction into the following parts:

The Letter, the Syllable, the Conjunction, the Article, Noun, the Verb, the Case, and the Speech.

1. The **Letter** is an indivisible sound yet, not any such sound but only one which can form part of a group of sounds. These sounds are divided into vowels, semi vowels and mutes.
2. **Syllable** is a non-significant sound made up of a mute and a letter with a sound (vowel or semi vowel).
3. A **Conjunction** is a non-significant sound. It may come at the end or in the middle of a sentence. It is also able to form one significant sound out of several insignificant sounds.
4. An **Article** is a non-significant sound that marks the beginning, end or it divides the point of a Speech. Its natural location is either at the end or in the middle.
5. A **Noun** is a significant composite part without any tense. The parts of Noun have no significance in themselves.
6. A **verb** is significant composite part with the idea of time, in which, as in the noun, no part is significant.
7. A **Case of Noun or Verb** uses inflections to express either the relation “of” “to,” or the like; that of number, whether one or many., or the modes or tones in an actual delivery, e.g., a question or a command.
8. A **Speech or a Sentence** is a composite significant sound, some at least of whose parts are in themselves significant.

5.Melody:

Melody or music is an external constituent of tragedy. It can encompass the rhythm of dialogue and speeches in a play or can mean the aspects of the melody and music compositions as with music theatre. Melody refers to chorus. In Greek dramas, **firstly**, chorus had the function of creating deep and meaningful connection between the characters and the audience. **Secondly**,

the chorus would allow the playwright to create a kind of literary complexity only achievable by a literary device controlling the atmosphere and expectations of the audience. **Thirdly**, the chorus would allow the playwright to prepare the audience for certain key moments in the storyline, build up momentum or slow down the tempo. Such usage of choral structure-making functions may be observed throughout many classical plays. The chorus in “Oedipus Rex” consisted of 15 Theban elders.

The chorus contains elaborative use of language or style, varying the voice of reason or that of emotion depending on occasion and the intention of the playwright. In the case of Sophocles' “Oedipus Rex”, the chorus did the task of engaging the viewers by creating interest and by presenting an alternative or additional viewpoint.

6.Spectacle:

The sixth and last external constituent of tragedy is Spectacle, and it concerns the manner of imitation. **The decoration of the stage is a major part of the spectacle.** The Spectacle is a theatrical effect presented on the stage. But **spectacle also includes scenes of physical torture, loud lamentations, dances, colorful garments of the main characters, and the beggarly or jocular appearance of the subordinate characters or of the fool on the stage.** Also, Spectacle includes all aspects of the tragedy that contribute to its sensory effects: costumes, scenery, the gestures of the actors, the sound of the music and the resonance of the actors' voices. Besides all these characteristics, Aristotle said that the least artistic of all is Spectacle.

In the script for “Oedipus Rex” spectacle is vague. There are not many stage directions (in many scripts there is not a lot of stage direction, leaving decisions up to the director.) But still the importance of action and movement cannot be taken for granted.

Thus, tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude. It has six constituent elements, which can serve to produce a grand tragedy, such as: plot, character, diction, thought etc. Without following the rules of these elements, one cannot be able to form a tragedy as great as Oedipus Rex and many other tragedies that one can find in literature. So, it may be said that in an ideal tragedy character should unify the plot with their thoughts, diction and chorus to arise the result of tragedy which is pity and fear in spectacle.