

What is Poetics?

the study of linguistic techniques in poetry and literature.

Aristotle's Poetics is the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory and first extant philosophical treatise to focus on literary theory. In this text Aristotle offers an account of "the poetic art". .

What is poetics according to Aristotle?

Aristotle proposes to study poetry by analyzing its constitutive parts and then drawing general conclusions. The portion of the Poetics that survives discusses mainly **tragedy and epic poetry**. ... He defines poetry as the mimetic, or imitative, use of language, rhythm, and harmony, separately or in combination.

What does poetics deal with?

The Poetics is primarily concerned with **drama and poetry**, and the analysis of tragedy constitutes the core of the discussion. Although the text is universally acknowledged in the Western critical tradition, "almost every detail about [t]his seminal work has aroused divergent opinions".

Why is Aristotle's Poetics important?

Aristotle's Poetics **seeks to address the different kinds of poetry**, the structure of a good poem, and the division of a poem into its component parts. He defines poetry as a 'medium of imitation' that seeks to represent or duplicate life through character, emotion, or action.

When did Aristotle write poetics?

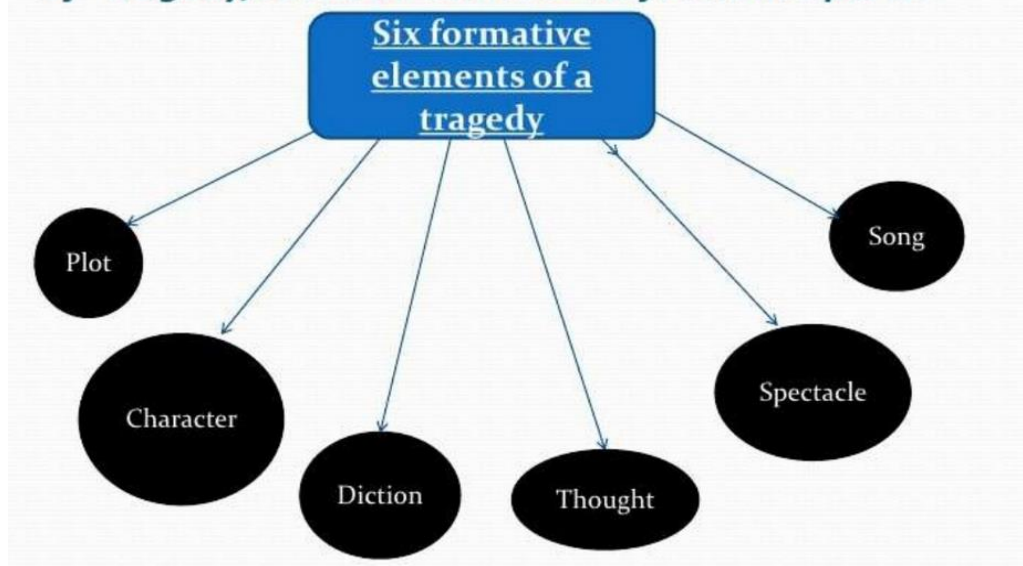
Like many important documents in the history of philosophy and literary theory, Aristotle's Poetics, composed **around 330 BCE**, was most likely preserved in the form of students' lecture notes.

Aristotle's concept of tragedy

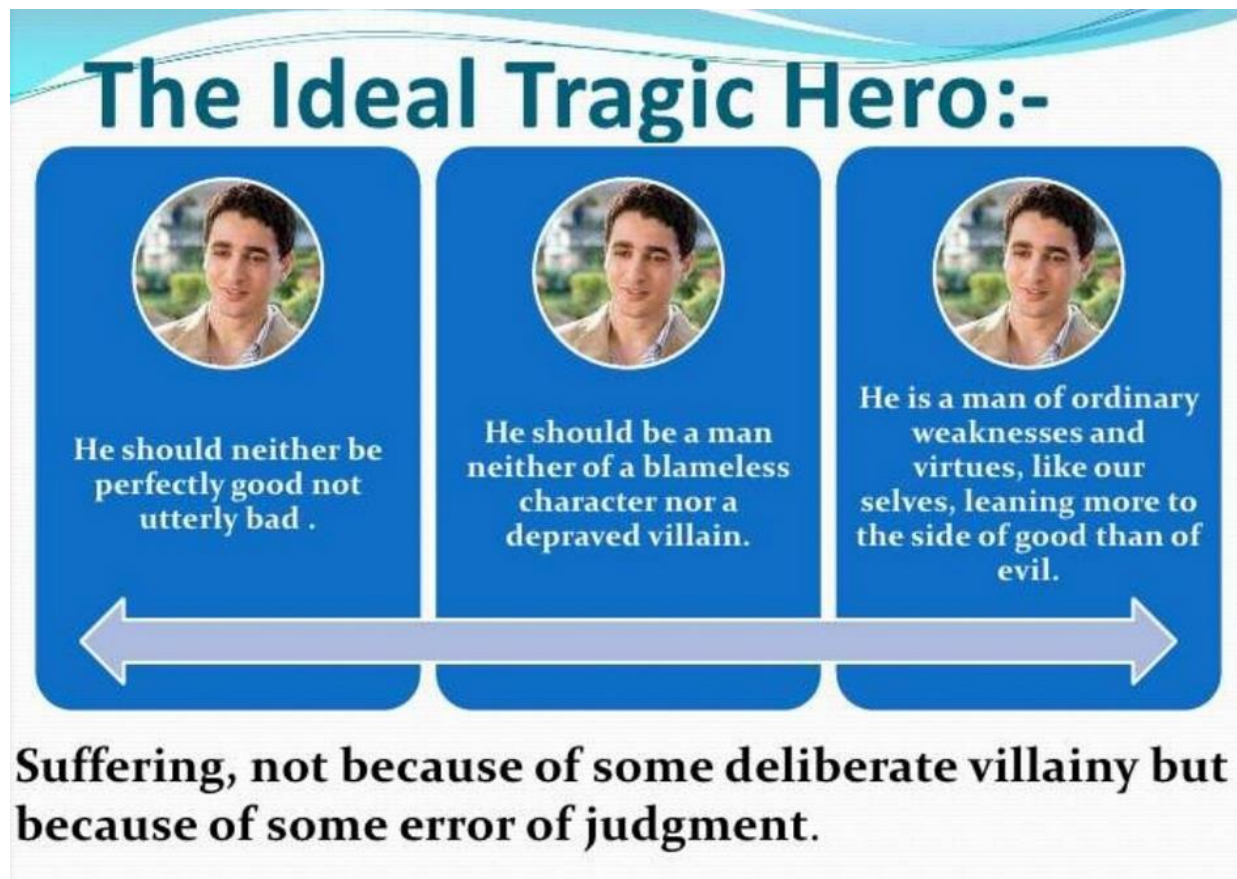
1. **Greek Definition:** "Sorrow drama with happy ending may be unhappy ending" E.g.: Rostam and Sohrab, Book by Ferdowsi
2. **Modern Definition:** "Sorrow drama with unhappy ending."
3. **Aristotle's Definition of Tragedy.** "the **imitation** of an **action, serious, complete**, and of a certain **magnitude**, in a **language beautified** in different parts with different kinds of embellishment, through actions (**Descriptive**) and not narration, and through scenes of **pity and fear** bringing about the '**Catharsis**' of these emotions."

- “the imitation of an action that is serious complete, and of a certain magnitude ” This means that a good tragedy deals with one issue that is very “serious. ” You can’t have a tragedy about something trivial like breaking a fingernail. “**Magnitude**” here means ‘size’. The tragic plot must have a certain magnitude or ‘length’. It should be long enough to allow the change from happiness to misery but not too long to be forgotten before the end. Action, too short, cannot be regarded as proper and beautiful for its different parts will not be clearly visible. Its different parts must be well-related to each other and to the whole. It must be an ‘organic’ whole.
- **In a language beautified** in different parts with different kinds of embellishment “By ‘language embellished,’ I mean language into which rhythm, ‘harmony,’ and song enter. By ‘the several kinds in separate parts,’ I mean that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.”
- **through actions and not narration** To narrate a story is simply to tell the story, like telling a friend what happened over the weekend. In a play, the story must be dramatized or acted out.
- and **through scenes of pity and fear** In a tragedy, the events or episodes in the play should lead the audience to feel very sorry for the main character—the tragic hero. The audience should also feel afraid for the hero as he moves toward a destructive end.
- **bringing about the ‘Catharsis’** of these emotions.” As the play moves along, the events should build up the emotions of pity and fear. A catharsis is a purging, or cleansing of the emotions--a release of tension. In a tragedy, this is often a moment of revelation when the tragic hero “falls flat on his face,” and the audience can finally “explode.”

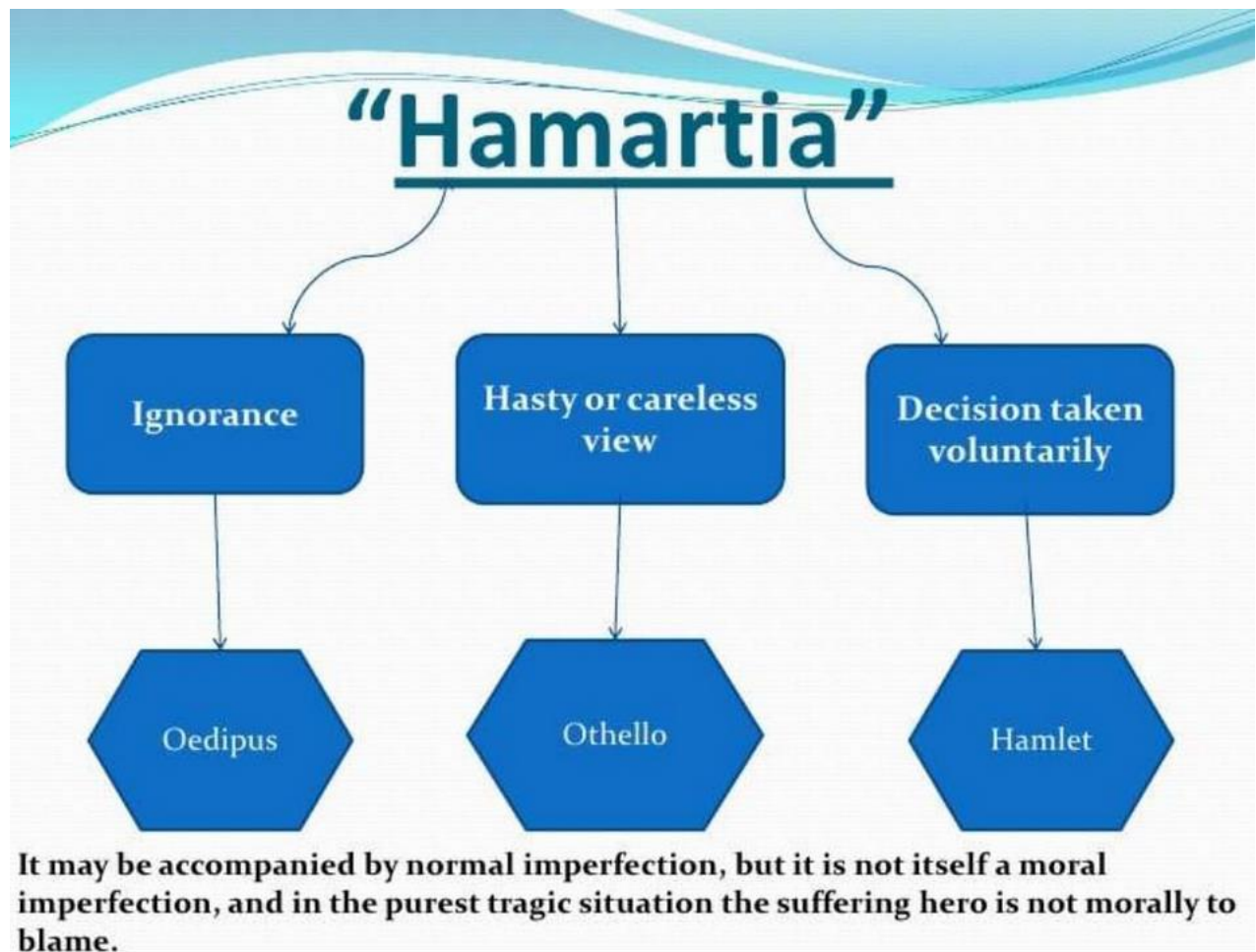
Having examined the definition, nature and function of ‘Tragedy, Aristotle comes to its formative parts.



4. These will be described from least important to most important. The last four elements (Thought, Diction, Melody, and Spectacle) are the least important, but Aristotle felt they must be done well for the play to succeed.
- **Thought** is the power of saying whatever can be said and should be said at each moment of the plot. Do the lines spoken by the actors make sense? Are they saying what should be said at each particular moment in the play?
 - **Diction** is the actual composition of the lines that are recited. Thought deals with what is said, and diction deals with how it is said. There are many ways to say something. A good playwright composes lines that say something extremely well. In a good play, some lines are so well constructed that the audience can leave the play quoting the lines exactly.
 - **Melody and Spectacle** are accessories. The Greeks sometime used musical accompaniment. Aristotle said the music(melody) has to blend in with the play appropriately. Spectacle refers to the staging of the play. Again, as with melody, the spectacle should be appropriate to the theme of the play.
 - **Character** Character is the second most important element of tragedy. Each character has an essential quality or nature that is revealed in the plot. The moral purpose of each character must be clear to the audience. The characters should have four main qualities.
 - No matter who they are (hero or slave), the characters must be good in some way, but not perfect. Wicked characters may be introduced if required by the plot.
 - The characters should act appropriately for their gender and station in life. They must have the traits of the profession or class to which they belong.
 - The characters have to have believable personalities means they must have likeness. By likeness he means that the characters must be life-like.
 - Each character must act consistently throughout the play. In other words, nothing should be done or said that could be seen as “acting out of character.”



Hamartia (meaning for clarity) The hero's error or frailty (hamartia) is often misleadingly explained as his "tragic flaw," in the sense of that personal quality which inevitably causes his downfall or subjects him to retribution. However, overemphasis on a search for the decisive flaw in the protagonist as the key factor for understanding the tragedy can lead to superficial or false interpretations. . In a more sophisticated philosophical sense though, the hero's fate, despite its immediate cause in his finite act, comes about because of the nature of the cosmic moral order and the role played by chance or destiny in human affairs. Hamartia would thus be the factor that delimits the protagonist's imperfection and keeps him on a human plane, making it possible for the audience to sympathize with him.



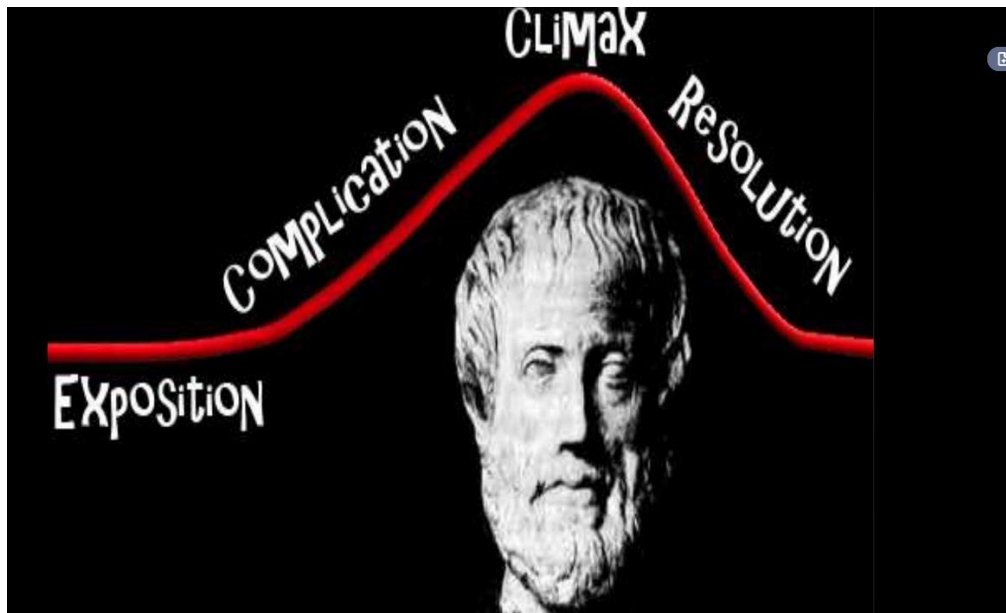
Aristotle's Concept of Pity and Fear "Pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortunes And fear by that of one like ourselves." "Actions capable of this effect must happen between persons who are either friends or enemies or indifferent to one another. If an enemy kills an enemy, there is nothing to excite pity either in the act or the intention...But when the tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another—if, for example, a brother kills, or intends to kill, a brother, a son his father, a mother her son, a son his mother, or any other deed of the kind is done—these are the situations to be looked for by the poet."

Aristotle's Concept of Catharsis Catharsis refers to the effect of the tragedy on human heart. Catharsis means cleansing of the heart from the harder passions by arousing the feelings of pity and fear through the sufferings and death of a tragic hero. It is Catharsis which transforms disturbing emotions into what Milton calls "Calm of mind, all passions spent" that's why Herbert Read considers Catharsis a medical term, which stands for purgation.

Plot Plot is the most important of the six elements that is the action of the play. "Hence, the Plot is the imitation of the action: for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents." 1. There must be Unity of Plot. This means "one complete action." Any events or episodes must be necessary to the main issue and must also be probable or believable. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all: writes Aristotle "the plot then is the first principle, and as if it

were, the soul of a tragedy. Character holds the second...thus tragedy is the imitation of an action, and of the agents mainly with the view of the action.”

“which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.”



Two kinds of Plots: simple and complex

- Simple:
 - Plot is simple when the change in the fortunes of the hero takes place without peripety and discovery.
- Complex:
 - The plot is complex when it involves one or the other or both. The Peripety is the change in the fortunes of the hero and the Discovery is a change from ignorance to knowledge.

Aristotle prefers complex plot, for it startles and captures attention.

The Three Unities The unity of action:

a play should have one single plot or action to sustain the interest of the spectators and it can also lead him to proper purgation. The unity of time: the action in a play should not exceed the single revolution of the sun. The unity of place: a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.

Aristotle emphasizes only one of the three unities, the Unity of Action; he is against plurality of action as it weakens the tragic effect. There might be numerous incidents but they must be related with each other, and they must all be conducive to one effect. As regards the Unity of Time, Aristotle only once mentions it in relation to dramatic Action. Comparing the epic and the Tragedy, he writes: "Tragedy tries, as far as possible, to live within a single revolution of the sun, or only slightly to exceed it, whereas the epic observes no limits in its time of action."

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A good plot has Peripety or Discovery--sometimes both. Peripety is the change from one state of things at the beginning of the play to the exact opposite state by the end of the play. This could be something like the change from being rich to being poor, or from being powerful to being powerless, or from being a ruler to being a beggar. The change that takes place in a tragedy should take the main character (and possibly other characters) from a state of happiness to a state of misery. Discovery is a change from ignorance to knowledge. This often happens to the tragic hero who starts out "clueless" and slowly learns how he himself created the mess he ends up in at the end of the play.

Change by itself is not enough. The character involved in the change must have specific characteristics to arouse the tragic emotions of pity and fear. Therefore, Aristotle said that there are three forms of plot that should be avoided.

A. A totally good man must not pass from happiness to misery. This will make the audience angry that bad things happened to him. They won't pity him so much as be angry for him.

B. A bad man must not pass from misery to happiness. This won't appeal to the audience at all because they won't want to see evil rewarded.

The true tragic hero cannot be too good or too bad, but he must end up in misery. Aristotle concluded that the best tragedy centers on a basically good man who changes from happiness to misery because of some great error. For example, he might have a good quality, like pride, that gets out of hand. 4. The plot of a tragedy also involves some horrible or evil deed. The tragic hero either does it consciously, does it out of ignorance, or mediates it (makes it easy for the deed to happen). For the audience to be horrified by the evil deed, the evil has to be done to someone important to the tragic hero. If the hero kills his enemy, the deed won't seem so bad. On the other hand, if the hero kills someone he doesn't care about, the audience won't care much either. To make it really horrible for the audience, Aristotle suggested that the evil deed should be done to a family member.

Conclusion According to Aristotle, the end of poetry is to give pleasure, and tragedy has its own pleasure beside. Proper aesthetic pleasure can be possible only when the requirements of morality are satisfied. Verse and rhyme enhance the pleasure of poetry. Peripeteia and Anagnorisis heighten the seductive power of the action. Pure pleasure results from the exercise of our emotions and thoughts on the tragic action. In addition, Aristotle's work had an overwhelming influence on the development of drama long after it was compiled. The ideas and principles of the Poetics are reflected in the drama of the Roman Empire and dominated the composition of tragedy in Western Europe during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.