

Tikrit University

College of Education for Humanities

English Department



Third Year - 2023-2024

Drama

(Tragedy, Comedy and Tragi-Comedy: Part 2)

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Comedy and Tragedy

The two major forms of Greek drama were the tragedy and the comedy. According to Aristotle, these elements define a tragedy:

- 1-The major characters in a tragedy are not average.
- 2-They are heroes, kings, and gods.
- 3-The conditions of a protagonist(s) life goes from good to bad.
- 4-A "tragic flaw" in the protagonist brings about his (or her) downfall. The punishment exceeds the crime.
- 5- The fate of many people is tied to the protagonist, so his or her downfall is a catastrophic event.
- 6-The purpose of a tragedy is catharsis, which cleans the soul of "fear and pity" that most people carry within themselves.

According to Aristotle, these elements define a comedy:

- 1-The major characters in a comedy are average people.
- 2-The conditions of a protagonist(s) life goes from bad to good.

Modern literary definitions of comedy and tragedy are mostly based on Aristotle's idea, although the definition has been simplified. There are two ways to look at it.

1-One way is to say that a comedy is a story that treats characters and situations in humorous way and ends happily for the protagonist, and that a tragedy is a story that ends unhappily for the protagonist.

2-Another way is to look at it in terms of the protagonist. If the protagonist succeeds in his or her goal, the story is a comedy, and if the protagonist fails, it is a tragedy.

Tragicomedy: is a literary genre. It is a dramatic work incorporating both tragic and comic elements.

-In the Renaissance, tragicomedy became a genre of play that mixed tragic elements into drama that was mainly comic.

-Nineteenth-century romantic writers adopt Shakespeare's use of tragicomedy in the belief that his plays closely mirrored nature, and they used him as a model for their works.

-Modern tragicomedy is sometimes used synonymously with Absurdist drama, which suggests that laughter is the only response left to man when he is faced with the tragic emptiness and meaninglessness of existence. Examples of this modern type of tragicomedy are Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* (1958).

The Merchant of Venice, by William Shakespeare, does not fit the conventional definitions of a tragedy or a comedy. It is categorized as a comedy, although one of the two distinct plotlines is a tragedy. This play is multi-faceted and is really a combination of two plays in one. *The Merchant of Venice* bridges the gap between comedy and tragedy.

Shakespeare blends serious issues and values with light comedic elements in this rather complex play. The two main plots are the comedy about Portia and her marriage to Bassanio and the tragedy about Antonio, the merchant and Shylock, the Jew.