

TRAGEDY

Aristotelian and Neo-Classical Tragedy

- Unities: Time (24 hours), Place (one), Action (No sub-plot)
- Related concepts:
 - Mimesis (imitation)
 - Catharsis (purification, purgation)
 - Hamartia (tragic flaw of error of judgement, incl. hubris)
 - Peripeteia (reversal)
 - Other rules (e.g. no violence on stage)
- Principally a European, esp. French phenomenon in the 16th and 17th centuries (Racine, Corneille); neo-classical drama didn't catch on in England largely due to civil war (although see Dryden's All For Love and Addison's Cato)
- An aesthetic principle, based on discussions of Aristotle's Poetics, principally that of Castelvetro (1570): a rigid framework of rules, for which the flexibility of classical drama offers little precedent. Aristotle attempts to define the characteristics of tragedy and its effects upon the spectator. Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus offered as great exemplar.
- Humanists such as Pope favoured them because they helped them be "true to nature":
 Those RULES of old *discover'd*, not *devis'd*,
 Are *Nature* still, but *Nature methodiz'd*.

Elizabethan and Jacobean Revenge Tragedy

- Partly derived from Seneca, whose manner is generally very different from Greek tragedy: uses exaggerated rhetoric, dwells on bloodthirsty details, introduces ghosts and magic. Due to translations, imitation was common. T.S. Eliot traces the influence in his 1927 essay *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca*.
- Its aesthetics often lead to the nickname "tragedy of blood". Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy often cited as prototype and helps usher in a new fashion.
- Violence not reported but on stage. Vendice in Tourneur's Revenger's Tragedy says, while slowly murdering the Duke: "When the bad bleed, then is the tragedy good"
- More psychological: not dependent on plot or unities. Stock ingredients often include:
 - Quest for vengeance;
 - Real or feigned insanity;
 - Play-within-a-play;
 - Scenes in graveyards;
 - Severed limbs and heads; scenes of carnage and mutilation.
- Chief proponents of Jacobean (late Shakespearean) revenge tragedy are Middleton, Webster (read The Duchess of Malfi), Beaumont and Fletcher.

Tragedy after the Jacobean period

- Rather dull and dry period of neo-classicism follows; tragedy, with odd exceptions, does not re-appear as a genre until the 20thC particularly in the work of European and American dramatists, viz: Ibsen, Strindberg, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Samuel Beckett.

WRITING BLACKNESS IN THE RENAISSANCE

PLAY	CHARACTER(S)	CHIEF CONTRIBUTION
Christopher Marlowe: <i>Tamburlaine</i> (1587)	3 Moorish Kings	They add to impression of Tamburlaine's power and conquest by emphasising extent of his victories and empire.
Thomas Peele <i>The Battle of Alcazar</i> (1588)	Muly Mahamet – <i>First play which has a representation of a black man as central character</i>	“the barbarous Moore/The Negro Muly Mahamet that withholds/The Kingdom from his Uncle Abdelmelec”. “This unbelieving Moore” offers raw lion's flesh to his wife who is faint from hunger. Portrayed as cruel, treacherous. Evil directly associated with his blackness. Finally denounced as “foule, ambitious” and is drowned.
William Shakespeare <i>Titus Andronicus</i> (1590)	Aaron, a villain	“Raven-coloured”, a “black devil” and a “coal-black Moor”; “If one good deed in all my life I did, I do repent it from my very soul.” “Oh how this villainy/Doth fat me with the very thought of it./ Let fools do good and <i>fair</i> men call for grace/ Aaron will have his soul black like his face”. Rape, mutilation (chopping off heads, hands, tongues) and death succeed each other rapidly as a result of Aaron's plotting. Lust results in a son. However: also see him showing great compassion for his son, “this treasure in mine arms”. Becomes heroic in his defence. Not solely barbarous
Thomas Dekker et al, <i>Lust's Dominion</i> (1599)	Eleazor.	Plots violent crime and has a bastard son with the Queen after an illicit affair. Enjoys evil for its own sake, associated with sexual potency, exhorts two black slaves: “Your cheeks are black: let not your sins be white”. But also says: “Black faces may have hearts as white as snow;/And 'tis a general rule in moral roles,/The whitest faces have the blackest souls”

There were very few black people living in England in the late 16th Century. Those that there were were an unfamiliar sight, and they provoked feelings of distrust, hostility, fascination and mystery. The average degree of Bible knowledge meant that most people were aware that black people were supposedly descended from Ham in the Genesis story, punished for sexual excess by their blackness. Therefore sexual potency was one of the attributes of the stereotyped black in the average white mind.

Writing about “Moors”:

1. The people are generally all tawney, moores, verye sturdye and stronge of bodye...They are very jealous of their wyves...and very hardlye can forget any injurye against them...The country swaynes are better, more lovinge, and patiente, but so simple that they will beleeve any incredible fiction.

Ortelius, Abraham: Epitome of the Theater of the World (1603)

2. The qualtyies principalley to be associated with black peoples are : courayge, pryde, guilelessness, credulity and passions arouseyed with a sudden flayre.

Leo, John: The Geographical History of Africa (1600)

3. It would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance in Desdemona, which Shakespeare does not have in the least to have contemplated.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor

NON-FICTIONAL, HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL RENAISSANCE TEXTS***FROM Baldesar Castiglione's THE BOOK OF THE COURTIER******A Good Reputation***

...Federico answered, "But because it seems that Fortune, in this as in so many other things, has a great influence on men's opinions, we sometimes see that a gentleman, however finely endowed and gifted as he may be, proves disagreeable to his lord and always, as we say, raises his gall; and this is for no discernible reason. Thus when he comes into his lord's presence, and before he has been recognised by the others, though his conversation may be fluent and ready and though his behaviour, gestures and words and everything else may be all that is desired, his lord will show that he has no regard for him and, indeed, will display contempt. And as an immediate result of this, the others will at once fall in line with the wishes of the prince and to each one of them it will seem that the man is worthless; nor will there be found any to value or respect him, or laugh at his witticisms or regard him as being of any account; on the contrary, they will all immediately start to mock him and hound him down...[t]his is the extent to which men obstinately adhere to opinions engendered by the favour or disfavour of princes. Therefore I should wish our courtier to bolster up his inherent worth with skill and cunning, and ensure that wherever he has to go where he is a stranger, and unknown he is preceded by a good reputation, and that it becomes known that elsewhere, among other lords, ladies and knights, he is very highly regarded..."

See Cassio, II.iii

How To Please

...Signor Unico remarked, "...It is certainly right to teach ladies how to love, because I've rarely encountered one who does know how to do so. And their beauty is nearly always accompanied by cruelty and ingratitude towards those who serve them most faithfully, and whose nobility, gentleness and virtue deserve to be rewarded. Very often, too, they abandon themselves to the most stupid and worthless rascals, who despise rather than love them. So to help them avoid these gross errors perhaps it would have been as well first to teach them how to choose a man worthy of their love and only then how to love him..."

See Desdemona and Brabantio, I.iii

...Signora Emilia replied, "...if a man is to be loved he must himself love and be lovable; and these two things are enough for him to win the favour of women...I declare that everyone knows and sees that you are most lovable; but I am very doubtful as to whether you love as sincerely as you claim...Your own constant lamenting and accusations of ingratitude against the women you have served, which do not ring true, considering your great merits, are really designed as a kind of concealment to hide the favours, the joys and the pleasures you have known in love, and to reassure those women who love and have abandoned themselves to you that you won't give them away. So they too are content that you should openly make a pretence of loving other women in order to conceal your genuine love for them. And so if the women you pretend to love now are not as credulous as you would wish, it is because your technique is beginning to be understood..."

See Emilia, IV.iii

FROM Michel de Montaigne's ESSAYS***On Liars***

Lying is indeed an accursed vice. We are men, and we have relations with one another only by speech. If we recognised the horror and gravity of an untruth, we should more justifiably punish it with fire than any other crime...[l]ying...[is] the only fault whose birth and progress we should consistently oppose. They grow with a child's growth, and once the tongue has got the knack of lying, it is difficult to imagine how impossible it is to correct it

That our Actions should be Judged by our Intentions

We cannot be held responsible beyond our strength and means, since the resulting events are quite outside our control and, in fact, we have power over nothing except our will which is the basis upon which all rules concerning man's duty must of necessity be founded.

See Iago, I.iii

FROM Niccolo Machiavelli's THE PRINCE***Those who Come to Power by Crime***

I believe there is a question of cruelty used well or badly. We can say that cruelty is used well...when it is employed once for all, and one's safety depends on it, and then it is not persisted in but as far as possible turned to the good of one's subjects...Those who use this method can, with divine and human assistance, find some means of consolidating their position...So it should be noted that when he seizes a state the new ruler must determine once all the injuries that he will need to inflict. He must inflict them once for all...and in that way he will be able to set men's minds at rest and win them over to him.

Military Organisation and Mercenary Troops

Mercenaries are useless and dangerous. If a Prince bases the defence of his state on mercenaries he will never achieve stability or security. For mercenaries are disunited, thirsty for power, undisciplined, and disloyal; they are brave among their friends and cowards before the enemy; they have no fear of God, they do not keep faith with their fellow men. The reason for all this is that there is no loyalty or inducement to keep them on the field apart from the little they are paid, and this is not enough to make them want to die for you.