

English 9
Agamemnon

Tragedy, according to *Poetics*,

1. “is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude”
2. shows characters of the "higher sort."
3. is written in “language into which rhythm, harmony, and song enter,” with “some parts . . . rendered through the medium of verse alone, others . . .with the aid of song”;
4. has as objects of imitation "men in action.” In tragedy these men (humans) are represented as better than they really are—*idealized*; shows humans as better than in actual life or as ideal forms (paragons).
5. comes “in the form of dramatic action, not of narrative”; uses direct narrative, *i.e.*, characters speak as themselves.
6. “falls into two parts--complication [*i.e.*, ‘incidents before the play opens and often others within the play itself. . . from the beginning of the action to the part which marks the turning point to good or bad fortune’] and unraveling or *dénouement* [*i.e.*, ‘that which extends from the beginning of the change to the end’].”
7. attempts to limit action to one day’s time, or only slightly more (unity of time)
8. presents a unity of plot or action, that is, actions should be connected, not random, and should work together to further the plot—no actions should be superfluous and no necessary actions should be omitted.
9. elicits pity and fear, emotions that are purged through the dramatic action by the end of the play (in other words, the purpose of tragedy is to bring about *catharsis* for the audience). Pity and fear should arise from the imitation of action in a tragedy. “. . . He who hears the tale told will thrill to the horror and melt to pity at what takes place.” Horror derived from spectacle is of lesser artistry and not true to the purpose of tragedy. “The scene of suffering is a destructive or painful action, such as a death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like...”
10. has a tragic hero, “a man extraordinarily good or just, who yet brings misfortune on himself not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty [*i.e.*, a tragic flaw in the character].”
11. may have a simple plot—“an action which is one and continuous. . . when the change in the hero’s fortune takes place without reversal of the situation [*peripateia*] and without recognition [*anagnorisis*]” (1232) or a complex plot—action. . . “in which the change is accompanied by such a reversal, or by recognition, or by both” (1232). Ideal tragedies have complex plots.

12. may feature reversal (*peripeteia*), recognition (*anagnorisis*), and the change in the hero's fortune that "arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of what went before."
- Reversal is "a change by which conditions in the play are transformed into their opposite," and
 - recognition is "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune."
 - "The best form of recognition is coincident with reversal of the situation." It can be brought about by an object of recognition, which can be an insignificant or significant thing or trait.