



A Review Paper on Tragedies in English Literature

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Abstract:

In English, the most famous and most successful tragedies are those of William Shakespeare and his Elizabethan contemporaries. Shakespeare's tragedies include: Antony and Cleopatra. Coriolanus. Shakespeare stands as a towering figure among tragic playwrights in English literature. Besides him, there were others who wrote beautiful tragedies but they have been overshadowed by Shakespeare. In this review paper the researcher conveys the Tragedies in English Literature.

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1. Elements of a Tragedy

The tragedy genre is one of the main branches of literary drama. Beyond having a sad ending, a tragedy features a main character known as a tragic hero. According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, literary tragedies must include the following elements:

- **hamartia** - the protagonist's tragic flaw
- **anagnorisis** - a tragic hero's change of heart (usually too late)
- **peripeteia** - a reversal of the tragic hero's fortune; the turning point toward tragedy
- **catharsis** - the release of emotions for the audience of a tragedy

Classical tragedies use this formula in a straightforward way. Later literary tragedies, including Shakespearean tragedies, use these elements to craft heart-breaking stories in unique ways.

2. Examples of Literary Tragedies

Literary tragedies bring the audience through a journey through the tragic hero's journey. Having learned the hero's tragic flaw, the audience watches them make terrible mistakes or suffer insurmountable challenges, leading to an ending marked by unnecessary death and suffering. Take a look at these literary Greek tragedies, as well as Shakespearean and modern literary tragedies.

3. Greek Tragedies

In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, for example, Oedipus has a tragic flaw -hubris, or excessive pride-which makes him a tragic hero. He has unknowingly killed his father and married his mother, Jocasta, to take the throne, which he learns in a moment of *anagnorisis*. His good fortune of a beautiful wife and kingdom is reversed, leading to the tragic death of Jocasta.

Other examples of Greek tragedies include:

- Agamemnon - *Aeschylus*
- Antigone - *Sophocles*
- The Argonautica - *Apollonius Rhodius*
- The Bacchae - *Euripides*
- Eumenides - *Euripides*
- The Frogs - *Aristophanes*
- Hippolytus - *Euripides*
- The Iliad- *Homer*
- Medea - *Euripides*

- The Odyssey - *Homer*
- Oedipus Rex - *Sophocles*
- The Oresteia - *Aeschylus*
- Prometheus Bound - *Aeschylus*

Though human tragedy existed long before the works of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides, dramatic tragedy did not. Greek drama was the birthplace of the literary tragedy, using elaborate sets and Greek choruses to fully demonstrate the dramatic impact.

3.1 Christopher Marlowe

He was born in the same year as Shakespeare in 1564 and he died in mysterious circumstances in 1593. During his short life, he wrote five tragedies and a number of poems. His main tragedies are as follows: (1) Tamburlaine (2) Dr. Faustus (3) Edward II.

Tamburlaine is a story of a bandit who built a great empire in Asia and finally conquered India and who set up the Mogul dynasty. He used this subject which shows his originality and independent mind. In this play too, we find very beautiful poetry. Dr. Faustus is the well-known story of Faustus' bargain with Mephistopheles (Satan). This is the legend which Goethe used in his masterpiece. It contains splendid poetry. The scene in which Faustus waits for the striking of midnight and arrival of Mephistopheles is one of the most terrible scenes in English literature. Marlowe's Edward II is a historical play. It is a story of young and irresponsible king who is destroyed by his own weakness.

3.2 John Webster (1580-c1635)

He wrote two tragedies which are still remembered. They are (i) The White Devil and (ii) The Duchess of Malfi. His tragedies are full of violence and horror. They are thrillers written in Senecan tradition.

3.3 Milton

He is primarily remembered as the epic poet but he wrote one tragedy in the style of classical Greek tragedy. As he was Puritan, he thought that the English stage had become immoral. He chose the subject from the Bible. Milton follows all the rules of Greek tragedy. 'Samson Agonistes' was written near the end of his life when he was blind and bearing suffering. There is a close resemblance between his own condition and that of Samson.

3.4 Dryden

He was a great satirist but he also wrote a tragedy named 'All for Love'. The subject which he chose was a bad period for tragic drama. During the Romantic age, only P.B. Shelley wrote a tragedy named the 'Cenci'. It is based on the theme of cruelty and madness of Cenci who hated children. At the end, Cenci is killed. During the Victorian age, Tennyson and Browning both tried their hands at tragic drama but they were soon forgotten.

3.5 Henrik Ibsen

He was a Norwegian writer. He was not English but his plays have been translated in to English and he has influenced modern writers very much. His plays 'A Doll's House' and 'Ghosts' are very appealing. Both of them discuss moral and social problems of real life in modern setting.

3.6 G.B. Shaw

He was influenced by Ibsen. He believed that drama should be concerned with politics and social problems. His 'Man and Superman' is a play which discusses life force. He borrowed the idea of a life force from French philosopher Bergson. All his plays deal with some social problems. 'Arms and the Man' deals with false heroism and war. 'Mrs. Warren's profession' deals with prostitution and sexual morality. 'The Doctor's Dilemma' is about social responsibility of doctors. 'The Apple Cart' is a play

about democracy and monarchy. 'Saint Joan' is a marvellous play about the death of St. Joan who was killed by the English people. It has a tragic note. Shaw always wrote with some social purposes.

3.7 John Galsworthy

He also wrote plays with some social problems. His plays can be called tragedies in real sense. They are fine example of conflict. His main plays are (1) Justice, (2) Strife, (3) Escape, (4) Loyalties and (5) Silver Box.

4. Conclusion

One of the most famous classical tragedies is Oedipus Rex. This Greek drama by Sophocles presents the dramatic story of Oedipus who, unknowingly, kills his father and marries his mother. Oedipus Rex meets all criteria for tragedy as a literary device. ... Oedipus blinds and exiles himself.

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