

AN ANALYSIS BETWEEN COMEDY AND TRAGEDY: A COMPARISON OF THE EFFECT OF TRAGIC AND COMIC ENDINGS IN THE WORKS OF ART IN CLASSICS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

***Farah Saeed, **Muhammad Yasir Akram**

*Lecturer English (BS-17) at Govt. Graduate College (w) Okara

**University of Lahore

ABSTRACT

The study aims at exploring the notion that tragedies can be more influential and impactful in comparison to those works of art that deal with humour. The theoretical framework of the study is taken from Aristotle's 'Poetics' where he highlighted the importance of tragedies and according to Aristotle, the comparison for supremacy may be about tragedy and epic but not about tragedy and comedy. Method of data collection was qualitative in nature in which personal interviews were conducted as the research tool. The population of the study were 10 professors at university level from three institutions who were teaching in English Literature discipline. The findings of the data through responses reveal that the deep impressions on the minds of the readers are mainly the tragic ones depicted through tragedies in comparison to the comic effects that the comedies contain. The study might be helpful in the re-assessment of the greatest classics of tragic literature in which tragedy acts as a vehicle of social reform.

1. Introduction

The study deals with the phenomenon that tragedies with their sadness, gloom and despondency possess an everlasting impact in the minds of the readers. According to Shelley (1820), the most memorable and loveliest melodies are those that deal with the most tragic ideas and feelings. As referred by Aristotle (1960), the father of criticism, tragedies were considered the supreme in comparison with the other genres of literature. The study compares and contrasts the endings of classics of world literature that deal with tragedies e.g. 'King Lear' (William Shakespeare), 'Dr. Faustus' (Christopher Marlowe), Tess (Thomas Hardy) with comedies like 'As She Stoops to Conquer' (Oliver Goldsmith), 'Importance of Being Earnest' (Oscar Wilde) and 'Waiting for Godot' (Samuel Beckett). The study may contribute towards the reformation of morals and manners of human beings through the element of pity and fear. The research might prove helpful for the betterment of people in general, and it may also influence the writers to focus on genuine problems of life and social evils of society.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- look into the various ways how tragic literature instructs as well as delights more than comic literature
- investigate the ways in which tragedies are more convincing
- to analyze the reasons for the comedies to be less guiding.

1.3 Research Question

In line with the objectives of the study, the following questions were considered.

- How are the tragic elements in classics of world literature more influential and captivating in comparison with the comic elements?
- What are the aspects that make tragic works of art more convincing?

- How is comic literature less influential than tragic one?

1.4 Literature Review

Elizabeth (1992) is of the view that tragedy, for Aristotle, is one of the poetic arts. The best tragedy can be regarded the one that has the ability to create the impact of a typical tragedy, i.e., arousing pity and fear, and because of this, it can fulfill the objective. A tragedy generally reflects the reversal of circumstances and sufferings, and this is ultimately the way how fear and pity for the main characters can be produced. The actions of the heroes that cause such outcomes must be what a tragedy should mainly depict.

Else (1967) argues that he must exclude 'the possibility of a comic catharsis'. The question of whether comedy can have a complex plot and a catharsis is 'peculiarly obscure'. He puts forward that the comic error can address an explanatory difference with misfortune, and that the comic error is a particular part of the complicated plot, to which we have not a great explanation for setting a comic analogue. Halliwell (1986) theorizes that Aristotle might not have viewed any comedy as his ideal. Aristotle might have believed that the class had not yet developed adequately to accomplish its last development.

Alexander (1994) argues that Aristotle describes the 'characteristic pleasure' of tragedy as the pleasure that comes from pity and fear through imitation. Aristotle's descriptions of learning are more progressive on the whole than they are destructive, just as the spectators of a tragic drama may gain wisdom from its plot reversal and benefit from a catharsis. We might derive from this that Aristotle perceived tragedy as an appropriate approach to perceive the pattern of human learning.

2. Research Methodology

Qualitative methods of data collection were used. The participants were interviewed, and their open ended responses were recorded related to the tragic endings and their effects. They were asked the following questions:

- Which of the mentioned dramas do you think leave a deep imprinted impression on the minds of the reader and why?
- If you were given a choice to opt for one of the genres between tragic and comic for the betterment of human behavior, which one would you prefer and why?

2.1 Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were ten professors from English discipline collectively from three different institutions: Govt. College (w) Okara, University of Okara and Govt. College University Lahore.

2.2 Tools for data collection

The data were collected through personal interviews where the participants were asked the mentioned questions and their responses were recorded manually by the interviewer.

2.3 Data Analysis and Discussion

No. of professors interviewed	Which of the mentioned dramas do you think leave a deep imprinted impression on the minds of the reader and why?	If you were given a choice to opt for one of the genres between tragic and comic for the betterment of human behavior, which one would you prefer and why?
Professor 1	Othello: The way he kills his wife with the doubt of betraying causes an acute depression for the reader.	Tragic: In my opinion, the moral aspects of human beings are best portrayed in tragedies.
Professor 2	As she stoops to Conquer: Sarcasm has been shown to depict the class of 20th century having follies, vices and ridicules.	Comic: Who would deny this fact that we are best taught when we are not being officially taught!
Professor 3	Dr. Faustus: How can the endless ambitiousness and the urge for immortality lead to the destruction of mankind.	Tragic: It is universally acknowledged that all the immoral acts end in destruction. This phenomenon can easily be carried by this genre of tragedy.
Professor 4	Importance of being Ernest: The way the social class is satirized with their manners and behaviors create a tragic impact on the reader.	Tragic: If we compare comedy with tragedy, the latter seems to be a better carrier of the bitter realities of life.
Professor 5	Tess: How fate plays with the lives of miserable human beings reflects the misery of living souls!	Tragic: Sufferings cause helplessness. Helplessness then leads to the question of the cause of one's being. This question has seldom been answered through a comedy.
Professor 6	King Lear: King Lear and Cordelia were more sinned against sinning.	Tragic: If we look closely, life wears a cloak of challenges and confusions, and these are harsh in nature.
Professor 7	Othello: Strangling Desdemona (Othello's wife) squeeze the reader's heart.	Tragic: Doubts sometimes create the controversial and barbaric decisions and through such endings, the readers can well analyze the importance of communicating the unseen.
Professor 8	Waiting for Godot: How tragic aspects are projected in a lighter way	Comic: The comedies have the tendency to contain and project

	bring both laughter and pity.	even the gloomiest aspects of life in a casual and absurd ways.
Professor 9	Dr. Faustus: Truce of any type with Satan can doom one's eternity	Comic: Observations show that even the most glorified tragedies are not complete without the comedy in them. This very contradiction strengthens my viewpoint.
Professor 10	Tess: The numerous sufferings Tess undergoes shed light on the cruel role of chance and fate in our lives)	Tragic: The decisions are made by us, and then rejected by forces of nature. These rejections basically create the fabric of human life and make them what they are.

From the above data, it can be analyzed that majority of the participants gave their responses in answer to the question of drama with the deep impressions are apparently the tragic ones. In answer to the 2nd question that targeted the genre to be more influential for the betterment of human beings with the respective reasons, 7 interviewees opted tragic to be the appropriate genre for teaching human beings the values and morals. Only 3 professors weighed comedy over tragedy. The justifications of the tragic works to be more influential came out to be various. The participants who selected 'tragedies' talked about how the harsh realities of life inciting pity and fear in the minds of readers can impact efficiently.

Conclusion

From the data analysis, it can be concluded that tragic work of arts are more influential and lesson imparting than those of comic works. The responses of the participants have strengthened the idea that the human mind can be defined, taught and polished through the elements of tragedy which prevail in human life in general.

References

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