



Benha University

Faculty of Education- Fourth Year

Drama

First Semester 2014/2015

## Respond to the following questions

### **1- Show the difference between modern and classical drama?**

#### **The Difference Between a Classical & a Modern Tragedy in Literature<sup>1</sup>**

*by Michael Stratford, Demand Media*

Tragedy can be classic or modern.

Classical tragedy preserves the unities -- one timespan, one setting, one story -- as they originated in the Greek theater. It also defines a tragic plot as one with a royal character losing, through his own pride, a mighty prize. Modern tragedy redefines the genre, with ordinary protagonists, realistic timelines and settings, and multiple plots.

#### **Unified Classic Tragedy**

According to Aristotle's Poetics, the tragic playwright must create a unified work. The play's running time must be the exact timespan of the tragedy, with no breaks or

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<sup>1</sup> <http://classroom.synonym.com/difference-between-classical-modern-tragedy-literature-3710.html>

flashbacks; the setting must remain in one place. Most importantly, the action follows one inevitable course, and the tragic hero must be royal or highborn. In addition, this hero desires a greater good, such as the rescue or unification of his kingdom, and he places that prize at great risk with his own choices.

## **The Elements of a Tragic Fall**

Aristotle further elaborates that the tragic hero must, by the play's end, lose everything he has gained through hubris -- blind pride that defies the gods. In Sophocles' Oedipal cycle, Oedipus tries to discover his birth secret, while Creon refuses honorable burial to Antigone's brother. Both heroes lose their kingdoms as a result. Shakespeare carries Greek-style hubris even further, as he has Macbeth lose his soul, Lear his sanity and Hamlet his conscious identity, before robbing each character of his life and kingdom as well.

## **A Critic Defines Modern Tragedy**

Critic Pauline Kael, in reviewing the movie of Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge," gives an excellent definition of modern tragedy when she notes that a tragic hero "must have greater aspirations, ambitions ... what does Eddie Carbone [the Miller tragic hero] want? He wants his wife's niece." The modern tragedy is thus redefined: in modern tragedies, smaller men with smaller dreams act through impulse, rather than hubris. The unities are ignored -- Miller's work spans weeks, with subplots -- although the characters' ends are still tragic.

## **Modern Tragedy Adds Irony**

Miller produced several modern tragedies about ordinary men with puny dreams and sorrowful finales; the most famous is "Death of a Salesman." Another contemporary example is David Mamet's "Glengarry Glen Ross," in which tragically small-minded salesmen fight over crooked sales jobs. Modern tragedy therefore adds irony to Aristotle's mix, reducing once-heroic tragic figures to the size of ordinary humanity.

**2- Analyze one of the characters you admire?**

## King Lear Characters Analysis<sup>2</sup>



**King Lear Characters Analysis features noted Shakespeare scholar William Hazlitt's famous critical essay about the characters of *King Lear*.**

WE wish that we could pass this play over, and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall far short of the subject; or even of what we ourselves conceive of it. To attempt to give a description of the play itself or of its effect upon the mind, is mere impertinence: yet we must say something.—It is then the best of all Shakespear's plays, for it is the one in which he was the most in earnest. He was here fairly caught in the web of his own imagination. The passion which he has taken as his subject is that which strikes its root deepest into the human heart; of which the bond is the hardest to be unloosed; and the cancelling and tearing to pieces of which gives the greatest revulsion to the frame. This depth of nature, this force of passion, this tug and war of the elements of our being, this firm faith in filial piety, and the giddy anarchy and whirling tumult of the thoughts at finding this prop failing it, the contrast between the fixed, immoveable basis of natural affection, and the rapid, irregular starts of imagination, suddenly wrenched from all its accustomed holds and resting-places in the soul, this is what Shakespear has given, and what nobody else but he could give. So we believe.—The mind of Lear, staggering between the weight of attachment and the hurried movements of passion, is like a tall ship-driven about by the winds, buffeted by the furious waves, but that still rides above the storm, having its anchor fixed in the bottom of the sea; or it is like the sharp rock circled by the eddying whirlpool that foams and beats against it, or like the solid promontory pushed from its basis by the force of an earthquake.

The character of Lear itself is very finely conceived for the purpose. It is the only ground on which such a story could be built with the greatest truth and effect. It is his rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to every thing but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him. The part which Cordelia bears in the scene is extremely beautiful: the story is almost told in the first words she utters. We see at once the precipice on which the poor old king stands from his own extravagant and credulous importunity, the indiscreet simplicity of her love (which, to be sure, has a little of her father's obstinacy in it) and the hollowness of her sisters' pretensions. Almost the first burst of that noble tide of passion, which runs through the play, is in the remonstrance of Kent to his royal master on the injustice of his sentence against his youngest daughter—"Be Kent unmannerly, when Lear is mad!" This manly plainness, which draws down on him the displeasure of the unadvised king, is worthy of the fidelity with which he adheres to his fallen fortunes. The true character of the two eldest daughters, Regan and Gonerill (they are so thoroughly hateful that we do not even like to repeat their names) breaks out in their answer to

Cordelia who desires them to treat their father well—"Prescribe not us our duties"—their hatred of advice being in proportion to their determination to 'do wrong, and to their hypocritical pretension to do right. Their deliberate hypocrisy adds the last finishing to the odiousness of their characters. It is the absence of this detestable quality that is the only relief in the character of Edmund the Bastard, and that at times reconciles us to him. We are not tempted to exaggerate the guilt of his conduct, when he himself gives it up as a bad business, and writes himself down "plain villain." Nothing more can be said about it. His religious honesty in this respect is admirable. One speech of his is worth a million. His father, Gloster, whom he has just deluded with a forged story of his brother Edgar's designs against his life, accounts for his unnatural behaviour and the strange depravity of the times from the late eclipses in the sun and moon. Edmund, who is in the secret, says when he is gone—"This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune (often the surfeits of our own behaviour) we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars: as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treacherous by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whore-master man, to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the Dragon's tail, and my nativity was under Ursa Major: so that it follows, I am; rough and lecherous. Tut! I should have been what I am, had the maidliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardising."—The whole character, its careless, light-hearted villainy, contrasted with the sullen, rancorous malignity of Regan and Gonerill, its connection with the conduct of the under-plot, in which Gloster's persecution of one of his sons and the ingratitude of another, form a counterpart to the mistakes and misfortunes of Lear,—his double amour with the two sisters, and the share which he has in bringing about the fatal catastrophe, are all managed with an uncommon degree of skill and power.

It has been said, and we think justly, that the third act of Othello and the three first acts of LEAR, are Shakespear's great master-pieces in the logic of passion: that they contain the highest examples not only of the force of individual passion, but of its dramatic vicissitudes and striking effects arising from the different circumstances and characters of the persons speaking. We see the ebb and flow of the feeling, its pauses and feverish starts, its impatience of opposition, its accumulating force when it has time to recollect itself, the manner in which it avails itself of every passing word or gesture, its haste to repel insinuation, the alternate contraction and dilatation of the soul, and all "the dazzling fence of controversy" in this mortal combat with poisoned weapons, aimed at the heart, where each wound is fatal. We have seen in Othello, how the unsuspecting frankness and impetuous passions of the Moor are played upon and exasperated by the artful dexterity of Iago. In the present play, that which aggravates the sense of sympathy in the reader, and of uncontrollable anguish in the swoln heart of Lear, is the petrifying indifference, the cold, calculating, obdurate selfishness of his daughters. His keen passions seem whetted on their stony hearts. The contrast would be too painful, the shock too great, but for the intervention of the Fool, whose well-timed levity comes in to break the continuity of feeling when it can no longer be borne, and to bring into play again the fibres of the heart just as they are growing rigid from over-strained excitement. The imagination is glad to take refuge in the half-comic, half-serious comments of the Fool, just as the mind under the extreme anguish of a surgical operation vents itself in sallies of wit. The character was also a

grotesque ornament of the barbarous times, in which alone the tragic ground-work of the story could be laid. In another point of view it is indispensable, inasmuch as while it is a diversion to the too great intensity of our disgust, it carries the pathos to the highest pitch of which it is capable, by showing the pitiable weakness of the old king's conduct and its irretrievable consequences in the most familiar point of view. Lear may well "beat at the gate which let his folly in," after, as the Fool says, "he has made his daughters his mothers." The character is dropped in the third act to make room for the entrance of Edgar as Mad Tom, which well accords with the increasing bustle and wildness of the incidents; and nothing can be more complete than the distinction between Lear's real and Edgar's assumed madness, while the resemblance in the cause of their distresses, from the severing of the nearest ties of natural affection, keeps up a unity of interest. Shakespear's mastery over his subject, if it was not art, was owing to a knowledge of the connecting links of the passions, and their effect upon the mind, still more wonderful than any systematic adherence to rules, and that anticipated and outdid all the efforts of the most refined art, not inspired and rendered instinctive by genius. One of the most perfect displays of dramatic power is the first interview between Lear and his daughter, after the designed affronts upon him, which, till one of his knights reminds him of them, his sanguine temperament had led him to overlook. He returns with his train from hunting, and his usual impatience breaks out in his first words, "Let me not stay a jot for dinner; go, get it ready." He then encounters the faithful Kent in disguise, and retains him in his service; and the first trial of his honest duty is to trip up the heels of the officious Steward who makes so prominent and despicable a figure through the piece. On the entrance of Gonerill the following dialogue takes place:—

"Lear. How now, daughter? what makes that frontlet on?

Methinks, you are too much of late i' the frown.

Fool. Thou wast a pretty fellow, when thou had'st no

need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O without a figure: I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing.—Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue; [To Gonerill], so your face bids me, though you say nothing. Mum, mum.