

What is a tragic hero ? Here is Aristotle's definition...

A tragic hero is a literary character who makes a judgment error that inevitably leads to his/her own destruction. In reading Antigone, Medea and Hamlet, look at the role of justice and/or revenge and its influence on each character's choices when analyzing any "judgment error."

Characteristics:



Aristotle once said that "A man doesn't become a hero until he can see the root of his own downfall."

An Aristotelian tragic hero must possess specific characteristics, five of which are below :

- 1) Flaw or error of judgment (hamartia) Note the role of justice and/or revenge in the judgments.
- 2) A reversal of fortune (peripeteia) brought about because of the hero's error in judgment.
- 3) The discovery or recognition that the reversal was brought about by the hero's own actions (anagnorisis)
- 4) Excessive Pride (hubris)

Initially, the tragic hero should be neither better or worse morally than normal people, in order to allow the audience to identify with them. This also introduces pity, which is crucial in tragedy, as if the hero was perfect we would be outraged with their fate or not care especially because of their ideological superiority. If the hero was imperfect or evil, then the audience would feel that he had gotten what he deserved. It is important to strike a balance in the hero's character.

Eventually the Aristotelian tragic hero dies a tragic death, having fallen from great heights and having made an irreversible mistake. The hero must courageously accept their death with honour.

Other common traits :

Some other common traits characteristic of a tragic hero:

Hero must suffer more than he deserves.

Hero must be doomed from the start, but bears no responsibility for possessing his flaw.

Hero must be noble in nature, but imperfect so that the audience can see themselves in him.

Hero must have discovered his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him.

Hero must understand his doom, as well as the fact that his fate was discovered by his own actions.

Hero's story should arouse fear and empathy.

Hero must be physically or spiritually wounded by his experiences, often resulting in his death.

The hero must be intelligent so he may learn from his mistakes.

The hero must have a weakness, usually it is pride

He has to be faced with a very serious decision that he has to make

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