

A Comparative Analysis of Classical, Shakespearean and Modern Tragedies

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ABSTRACT: *Tragic drama since the Classical Greece has had some distinct changes in the course of its development. Since the time of Sophocles, tragedy has been shaped by different theatrical conventions and philosophies. It has experienced different kinds of change under various kinds of situations, pressures etc., which obviously came from the changing world about it. Each period sees the development of a special orientation and emphasis, a characteristic style of theatre. The framework of this paper falls on its search to draw a comparative analysis of the Classical, Renaissance and Modern tragedies. The tragic conception from the time of the Greeks to the present has undergone a metamorphosis in definitions and experience. This paper therefore highlights the fundamental similarities and differences between the tragedies of the Classical, the Renaissance and the Modern ages. It discusses the overall significance of changes in convention which tragedy like every other genre has undergone from the ancient period. The paper concludes that it is obvious from the consideration of the three great periods of tragedy that no theatrical period ever repeats itself as there are differences among them as there must be since the theatre of any given period reflects the world in which it exists.*

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, tragedy, Sophocles, classical, renaissance, modern period.

INTRODUCTION

J.A. Cuddon in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines comparative literature as the “examination and analysis of relationship and similarities of literature of different peoples and different nations. (1991, n. pag). Susan Bassnet avers that, “Comparative literature involves a study of texts across cultures; it is interdisciplinary and is concerned with patterns of connection in literature across both time and space”. (1) Comparative analysis does not in itself commit one to any other principle than that comparison is a most useful technique for analyzing works of art. As Anthony Thorlby pointed out:

To see one poem, or one picture or one building is to have little feeling for its qualities. To see another example of the same thing, which being another work of art is of course not the same but only ‘comparable’ is to take the first step towards recognizing what is in each case good, original, difficult, intended. (Quoted in Ezeh 93).

The need for a comparative analysis of the plays under study is in line with the view of Mathew Arnold in his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1857 that, “everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other literatures”. (Quoted in Ezeh 93).

Aristotle defines tragedy in his *Poetics*, as ‘An imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in the separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative, through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions’. (36) Tragedy in the Greek world of the fifth century B.C assumed the face of an orderly art of “poetic dialogue and choral lyricism”. (Gassner, Introduction XIII) It is almost impossible to make generalizations about the matter of Greek tragedy that are true without exceptions. Nevertheless, it remains true that almost all tragedies tell stories of suffering, of mental and physical anguish, of the waste of life and prosperity.

During the Renaissance period, there was a rise of tragedy that is, “full of the bustle of human desire on the part of extraordinary men bent upon self – realization or gratification of their will – to – power”. (Gassner XIV) Classical and Renaissance tragedy focused on the life of a protagonist of a high birth who, because of a fatal moral law or an error of judgment, experienced a disastrous reversal of fortune, and proceeded from happiness into suffering and even death. In the Modern period, we arrive at an age in which the destiny of man is no longer considered the effect of a malevolent superior star, a morally determined doom or an act of independent will but the result of biological, psychological and social factors. Clearly tragedy has been able to change or adapt even in periods when standards seemed to be most firmly established in fifth century B.C and seventeenth century France.

This paper analyses the fundamental similarities and differences between the tragedies of the Classical, Renaissance and Modern ages using Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*; Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Othello*; Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and Emeka Nwabueze’s *When the Arrow Rebounds*. The analysis will be done under two headings: The Substance of Tragedy and The Effect of Tragedy.

THE SUBSTANCE OF TRAGEDY

Aristotle categorized drama into the following six elements, which are listed in their order of importance as he viewed them: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Music and Spectacle. These elements constitute the very basis of tragedy itself: the first three dealing with structure, the last three dealing with style. To Aristotle, the elements of tragedy are the foundation for all tragedies. All of these elements expertly combined, help to bring about the emotional reaction: Pity and Fear.

Plot

Plot according to Aristotle is the “life and soul of tragedy”. Plot provides structure which enables the audience to see, appreciate, and share in a dramatic action which has a beginning, middle and an end. The plot tells a story which whether short or long, falls into the following classification: exposition, complication, climax and denouement. The plot is arranged to produce a cumulative effect by giving the play tension and emotional momentum at the same time, providing explanation and meaning for the sum total of the parts.

Plots vary from the tightly knit simple or complex plots, to the complicated action of the Elizabethans, with their several sets of characters involved in overlapping situations, to the realistic plots and finally to the contemporary experiments in expressionistic, absurd or episodic plots that have little regard for disciplined construction. It was in fact the practice of the Greek tragic writers to create simple, well-articulated plots while the plots of the Renaissance writers are complex, composed of several incidents across an expanse of time. Most of the plays contain a sub plot or a set of secondary characters that extend the meaning and impact of the play to all human activity. The modern plots may be realistic, absurd,

episodic etc. Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Nwabueze's *When the Arrow Rebounds* both have realistic plot, though the structure of *Death of a Salesman* subverts the traditional linear narrative by intermingling Willy's internal monologues and past recollections with the present action of the plot. *When the Arrow Rebounds* is Emeka Nwabueze's dramatized recreation of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*. It analyzes Ezeulu's perception of the sociopolitical dynamism in Umuaro and his conception of his own experience with the Whiteman. The play centres on how he confronts the colonial powers and the missionaries. The central conflict revolves around the struggle between continuity and change manifested in the Ezeulu's refusal to be no man's chief except Ulu and Oduche's who accepts Christianity. The play is set in the fictional Umuaro village in Igbo community of British Nigeria in the 1920s. The play opens with the festival of the pumpkin leaves in honour of Ulu, a deity worshiped by the six villages of Umuaro. Ulu is a god created by the people of Umuaro in a time of crisis to rule over the individual gods of the six federated villages and thereby increase the security of the loose federation. Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu, is invited by Wintabota to become a part of the British Indirect Rule as a warrant chief. Ezeulu's refusal lands him in prison. His absence affects his traditional duties and triggers many developments that leads to the fall of Umuaro traditional values. As a chief priest Ezeulu is responsible for safeguarding the traditions and rituals of the people. For example, he watches each month for the new moon; only he can name the day of the new yam festival, this he does after he has finished eating the sacred yams. Ezeulu refuses to eat the three remaining sacred yams after he returns from prison despite the pleas of the elders. The delay of the festival causes severe suffering for the people who cannot harvest their yams until after the new yam festival which must be called by Ezeulu.

Mr Good Country, the Christian catechist sees this as an opportunity and proposes that the villagers offer thanks to the christian God who will in turn protect them from the wrath of Ulu. Having reached their breaking point, the villagers converts to Christianity, and attends the christian harvest. Consequently, Ezeulu watches the disintegration of the tradition he wishes to preserve; the death of his favorite son Obika and the loss of his sanity.

Every tragedy whether classical, Renaissance or modern has a recognizable plot which may be simple, complex, episodic etc. Differences, however, may abound in the characteristics of plot that according to Aristotle are essential or valuable. These include *Peripeteia* or *Reversal*; *Anagnorisis* or Recognition and the Unity of Action.

Peripeteia is an ironic twist, a change of situation from seemingly secure to vulnerable. It is a shift in fortune from good to bad that moves on to the tragic catastrophe. *Peripeteia* is the reversal of circumstances or turning point. *Anagnorisis* is a moment in a play when a character makes a critical discovery; a sudden awareness of a real situation, the realization of things as they stood. It is the hero's recognition or discovery of the identity of some character or the nature of his own predicament, which leads to the resolution of the plot.

Aristotle considers *anagnorisis*, leading to *peripeteia*, the mark of a superior tragedy. All the plays understudy have these powerful elements. In *Oedipus the King*, the messengers' news about Oedipus that he thinks will cheer him up, instead slowly brings about the awful recognition of who Jocasta, Laius, him and his children really are and these lead to his catastrophe. The three phases of Oedipus' life are brought together in the single moment of recognition and reversal for which the play is famous: Oedipus is child, father, husband, brother; he recognized that he has committed parricide, incest, and he was enlightened, blinded and cursed all at once. In *Antigone*, Creon was blinded in his uncompromising and egotistical attitude and could not see the harm in his action until it is too late. His action triggers a sequence of events

that leads to his downfall: deaths of Antigone, Haemon and Eurydice. After their death, Creon experiences his moment of clarity when he realizes the true faults of his actions and the effect it has caused on the lives of others. He realizes that he has lost everything that is worth living for.

Macbeth's vaulting ambition drives him to murder King Duncan in order to take the throne of Scotland. To secure the throne, he assassinates Banquo, Macduff's family when he did not get Macduff himself. These acts turn him into a monster contrary to what he was supposed to be at the beginning of the play. Macbeth finally realizes that the witches have led him to his doom, when all of their seeming impossible predictions actually occur: The Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane Hill and Macduff is actually not born of a woman. Othello allowed himself to be manipulated by Iago leading to a breakdown in communication and trust between Othello and his wife Desdemona. Because of his jealousy and gullibility, he murders his own wife and realizes when it was very late that Desdemona was never unfaithful and that Iago is not honest Iago. Hence, Othello kills himself out of remorse.

In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman has set out on a quest to get money, achieve fame and success as a travelling salesman but he ends up achieving the exact opposite results of his desires or plans – debt, a failure and ultimately exhausted. Willy realizes that his dreams of success have not materialized and his failure leads him to commit suicide. Nwabueze's Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu felt he could be subordinate to no one and rises up in direct confrontation with both the Whiteman and his Umuaro community. He could not fight successfully against such outnumbering odds and was completely defeated. Ezeulu witnesses the disintegration of his family, his religion and even his own sanity.

The notion that play-wrights must observe rules or conform to the unities has had very little acceptance in the theatre except in the 17th century France and Italy. Having re-discovered Aristotle's *Poetics* earlier than their English – speaking neighbours, the French established a highly formalistic model of tragic dramaturgy based on this unities. It has been pointed out earlier that it was mistaken interpretation which ascribed the three unities of Action, Time and Place to Aristotle. He set forth the principle of unity of action that is derived from the unified and complete nature of a story's action, which must be a "complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected. The Greeks were much more fastidious about the unity of action which stipulates that action represented in a play should be just one single whole without any digressions whatsoever. Hence, Greek plays confine themselves most remarkably to what is essential to the tragic theme of the play. Nothing is done which the development of the tragic idea does not directly demand. No attempt is made by the use of subsidiary scenes and minor characters to set the main action against the background of ordinary life. The action is normally confined to one place and time and there are no subplots. Sophocles observed the three unities of Action, Time and Place in *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*.

The Renaissance Elizabethan playwrights ignored the unity of action probably because the physical theatre permitted the use of complicated stories and actions. However, the playwrights often achieved a kind of unity of character by focusing the action on one dominant character. Paul Kottman observes that the Elizabethan writers knew no Aristotelian unity of time and place because, according to him, "such a unity is no longer part of our contemporary lived experience given all the distracting, competing demands on our attention". (6) Shakespeare did not observe the three unities of Action, Time and Place. *Macbeth* and *Othello* both contain a subplot or a set of secondary characters. He abused the unities of place and time by jumping from one location to another within the same play and created differences in time of the actions up to months and even years.

Arthur Miller in *Death of a Salesman*, observed the unities of time, place and action. The play depicts the last twenty-four hours in the life of Willy Loman, a sixty-three year old travelling Salesman for thirty-six years and all the actions take place in Brooklyn, New York. *Death of a Salesman* has a relatively strong unity of action. The action of the play centres on Willy Loman, and his family. Through the character of Willy and his family, Miller uses the play to convey the tragic consequences of unerring devotion to the American dream. Miller, like Shakespeare used a set of secondary characters to bring home his biting critique of Capitalism. Nwabueze's *When the Arrow Rebounds* also observed the Unity of action as the play centres on Ezeulu's battles with colonialism and Christian influences. It however, violated the unities of time and place spanning through many months and locales.

Character

The second important element of tragedy as classified by Aristotle is character: A representation of an individual being presented in a dramatic work. According to Aristotle, character supports Plot. The personal motivation or actions of the characters are intricately involved with the action to such an extent that they arouse pity and fear in the audience. The characteristics of the tragic hero as defined by Aristotle are that: A tragic hero must be a nobleman, illustrious or a person of high estate; must fall from high to low estate and would be a person who is neither perfect in virtue and justice nor one who falls into misfortune through vice and depravity: but rather, one who succumbs through some miscalculation. This miscalculation called by some the tragic flaw is a controversial term – '*Harmatia*'. The term has been a source of argument. There are generally two groups of interpretation of *Harmatia*: Those that emphasize the moral aspect of the flaw and those like Leon Golden that emphasize the intellectual aspect, making *harmatia* an error of judgement or mistaken assumption. No matter the chosen interpretation, all the heroes of the plays understudy are guilty of both the moral and the miscalculation or mistaken assumption. Oedipus' moral flaw and mistaken assumption are fiery temper and assuming that Polybus and Merope are his real parents respectively; Creon's stubbornness led him to place human law above divine law; Macbeth's ambition was fired by the belief in the witches' prophecy that he will never be destroyed due to seemingly impossible conditions; Othello's jealousy and gullibility and placing implicit trust on 'honest' Iago; Willy's self-delusion and belief that he is a well-liked person who does not make mistakes, Ezeulu's pride and stubbornness that leads him into stretching the people's suffering beyond limit thereby pushing them to embrace the Whiteman's God and religion.

The plays, aside Miller's *Death of a Salesman* conform to the classical concept that tragic action should be built around royalty or nobility. Oedipus is the king of Thebes endowed with extra ordinary wisdom; Creon is a king; Macbeth is a general of extra ordinary prowess who has covered himself with glory in putting down a rebellion and repealing an invasion of a foreign army. He later became the king of Scotland; Othello holds the highest ranking military position – The Governor general of Cyprus, a city state in the great state of Venice. His title alone exudes an air of nobility, confidence and authority. Bradley characterizes him "as a truly admirable character, of heroic stature, exemplary of self-control and wonderful imagination". (Quoted in Dieter 66); and Ezeulu is the chief priest of Ulu, the greatest deity in Umuaro. He is so outstandingly important that the colonial authorities even considered making him a Warrant Chief. It is perhaps important to point out that just as there is no agreement relative to the hero's nobility, so the Aristotelian concept that there should be some lack in the hero himself, some type of flaw or *Hamartia* does not find common acceptance today. Arthur Miller argues that:

Aristotle having spoken of a fall from heights, it goes without saying that someone of the common mould cannot be fit for a tragic hero. It is now many centuries since Aristotle lived. There is no more reason for falling down in a faint before his *Poetics* than Euclid's geometry, which has been amended numerous times

by men with new insights, nor for that matter, would I choose to have my illnesses diagnosed by Hippocrates rather than the most ordinary graduate of an American medical school, despite the Greek's genius. Things do change and even a genius is limited by his time and the nature of his society. (108)

A.C Bradley also expressed belief that the tragic flaw if one wishes to use the term, may be the hero's very faith in himself. This article completely aligns to the foregoing positions because firstly, nobility of birth does not necessarily translate to nobility of mind or action. Secondly, the degree of guilt or the flaw seems to have little or nothing to do with Poetic justice. Otherwise, how can one equate the suffering of Oedipus with that of Antigone or Othello with that of Macbeth? Therefore, as Miller opines, "The flaw or crack in the character, is really nothing- and need not be nothing- but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of the rightful status". (894-95) And thirdly, as we survey the list of persons designated tragic heroes of the plays under study, from Oedipus to Ezeulu, the chief characteristic that emerges and that which causes our admiration is their commitment – a wholehearted giving over of oneself to a chosen line of action: Oedipus' commitment to uncovering the murderer of King Laius even when it was becoming obvious that he could be the culprit; Creon's refusal to change or cancel his verdict on Antigone despite all persuasions. Macbeth's refusal to back off even at the point of realization that the witches had deceived him; Willy refuses to change his view of the world and continues to struggle. His unwillingness to submit passively to established order or values takes him down; and Ezeulu defied all appeal to eat the three remaining yams in order to announce the date of the New Yam festival despite the fact that the elders are ready to bear the consequences.

One key characteristic of these tragic heroes is that they will not compromise. They must see life through on their own terms, no matter the cost. They are prepared to acknowledge no authority outside their own will. However, what tragedy generally insists upon is that this attitude, this ultimate expression of their own freedom to express themselves, lead step-by-step inevitably to self-destruction. Finally, the tragic hero or protagonist of any tragedy should have all the characteristics of a good character, as such; the character should be true to self; true to type; true to life and probable.

A major difference in the characters of the plays under study is the use of a chorus in the classical plays. The chorus is treated as a group character that expresses opinions, gives advice and occasionally highlights the playwright's point of view to establish a standard against which the actions of the characters could be judged. The chorus addressed the audience as both spectators to the action and participants in the total theatrical event. They suffered as citizens of the fictional world, but also judged action from an external perspective. Accompanied by a flute player, the chorus remained on stage throughout the play. They sang an ode between each incident of action and occasionally split into two groups to alternate singing of the stanzas of the ode.

Renaissance tragedy largely dispensed with the chorus – the foundation of the theatrical events in Athens. Dramatists replaced the chorus with confidants: Lady Macbeth had the Gentle woman and Desdemona had Emilia. And if the communication of the play demanded it, the dramatist would present behaviour quite unlike life. Therefore, characters speak their own thoughts aloud to the audience in Soliloquies and Asides. Soliloquies are universally associated with Shakespeare's great tragic heroes. It is one of the principal means by which he created a direct relationship between his characters and his audience and some of the most famous lines in the English language are contained in these character-to-audience communications. Typically, the soliloquies deal with major decisions and challenges faced by a character in a time of crisis and change. A good example is Macbeth's speech after the death of Lady Macbeth:

Macbeth: She should have died hereafter. There would have been time for such a word (...) Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. (219)

Nwabueze and Miller also dispensed with the services of the classical chorus. Chorus grew out of the poetical aspect of the classics and the modern playwright no longer finds the chorus in nature. As Schiller observes:

The use of chorus had suited the pure poetic form of classical drama, after all Greek drama originated from the chorus. But as drama progressed and the need arose for it to shed more of its weight of ultra-illusion, the chorus had to give way to more realistic and believable expressions. (474)

Thought / Theme

Thought, the third element of tragedy refers to the reasoning aspect of drama. It concerns the play's theme, that is, the central message or idea of a play. According to Brockett, "Thought includes the themes, the arguments, the overall meaning, focus, or significance of the action (...) Thought is also one of the major sources of unity in drama, for action may be organized around a central idea, motif or concern". (*The Theatre* 40).

Thought is the governing concept for a play, a playwright's conscious reason for creating a work of art, his idea. It is the writer's point of view. Theme is present in all plays even those that seem to be without purpose, for a playwright cannot avoid expressing ideas through the actions and characterizations of the play, which always imply some view of human behaviour. The ideas of great plays have been sources of endless critical contentions. A brief discussion of one major theme of each play understudy will be undertaken.

The major idea that runs through Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* is "The Power of Fate". Oedipus was destined to fulfil Apollo's prophecy of killing his father and marrying his mother. Even though, Oedipus was given to a messenger to be killed on Mt. Cithaeron, fate drives him to spare Oedipus and to give him away. Oedipus was raised as a Prince in Corinth. Hearing that he is to kill his father and marry his mother, he flees Corinth. On his way, he kills his father and after coincidentally ends up in Thebes. Fate also endowed him with the wisdom to unravel the mystery of the sphinx's riddle. This wins him the throne of Thebes and Queen Jocasta, unknown to him that she is his mother, thereby fulfilling the second part of Apollo's prophecy. Throughout the play, metaphors of blindness versus light associate sight with truth. In the end however, the only one who seems to have known the truth was the blind prophet Tiresias. It is obvious that Oedipus has a desire to flee and hence avert his fate but it continually catches up with him. In this way, Sophocles asserts that the gods are more powerful than humans, and that there is a limit to man's ability and reason.

In *Antigone*, the theme is the conflict between the divine law and civil law. Creon establishes a law that goes against divine or religious principles. He demands that Polyneices' body should not be buried but left to rot in the sun and be devoured by dogs and birds because Polyneices is a traitor. What Creon fails to understand is that no man can create a law that supersedes divine laws and that the duty to bury the dead is part of what it means to be human, not part of what it means to be a citizen. Even when Tiresias advised Creon, he refuses to accept it nor does he believe when he tells him of his fate. Though Creon has good intentions – he is loyal to his state, but he makes poor judgment. In the end, he pays dearly for his mistake.

Also glaring in the play is Antigone's staunchness in holding to what she knew to be right without compromising.

In *Macbeth*, the evil that human ambition can manufacture pervades the entire play. Macbeth's vaulting ambition drives him to kill King Duncan and occupy the throne of Scotland. In order to secure the throne, he murders everybody he perceives to be in opposition. This ambition turns him into a monster, contrary to what he was supposed to be at the beginning of the play. He finally realizes that the witches have led him to his doom, when all of the seeming impossible conditions of the prophecy actually occur: The Birnam wood seems to move to Dunsinane and Macduff happens not to be born of a woman.

The Theme of Ravages of Jealousy and the Pervasiveness of evil is very dominant in *Othello*. Othello allows himself to be manipulated by Iago leading to a breakdown in communication and trust between Othello and Desdemona his wife. Because of his jealousy and gullibility, Othello murders his own wife and recognizes very late that Desdemona was never unfaithful and that Iago is not 'honest Iago'. As a result, Othello kills himself out of remorse.

Secondly, the audience is given insight into Iago's evil nature and intentions while everybody in the play is utterly deceived by his pretensions. The more the other characters' act according to Iago's schemes, the more certain becomes the destruction of the protagonist and the more agonizing it is to watch Iago's evil machinations.

Death of a Salesman is an indictment of American capitalism and a rejection of materialist values. The major theme in the play is the failure of the American dream. Willy Loman wanted the material goods of a growing America: a car, refrigerator, a home of his own. Above all, he wanted a family, including a wife who kept house for him and sons who would be well liked in school and be successful when they grew up. Willy believes in the American dream wholeheartedly. His blind faith and his stunted vision of the American dream leads to his rapid psychological decline when he is unable to accept the gap between his dream and his life as it is: The gap between the American dream's promise of eventual success and the devastating reality of one's concrete failure. Miller portrays the pained emptiness of a dream deferred, a dream that seems like a mirage; like that green light, the shining promise of a better future, never to be attained. Miller also highlighted the dignity of the common man. He shows the position of the ordinary man, his passions, feelings and dreams etc.

In *When the Arrow Rebounds*, Emeka Nwabueze highlights the conflict between traditional values of Umuaro and Christianity. The life of the people of Umuaro is dictated by traditions and customs. Seasons are punctuated by rituals and festivals are managed by the priests of the various deities associated with each village. Ulu provides the important purification rites as well as the feast associated with fruitfulness. Umuaro's traditions are undermined by the coming and power of the Whiteman, Christianity and Ezeulu's stubbornness and insistence on adhering to tradition. Ezeulu felt he could not be subordinate to no one and rose up in direct confrontation to both the colonialists and the Umuaro community. His refusal to eat the remaining yams in order to announce the date of the New Yam festival increases the people's suffering to an unbearable condition and consequently, pushes the people to embrace Christianity since they were promised protection from Ulu's wrath. Thus, Christianity triumphs over traditional Umuaro religion. Consequently, Ezeulu witnessed the disintegration of his family, his religion and even his own sanity.

Language/ Diction

Diction refers to language, and language involves the words the characters speak. The major function of diction is to provide a means for communicating the character's thoughts and ultimately to convey the playwright's meaning to the audience. Language must be clear, for comprehensibility of the message, because in the theatre, there is no luxury of pausing to weigh and consider a line before hearing the next. Over the years, dramatists have utilized a variety of dialogue devices. One of the most interesting devices by the Greeks is *Stichomythia* that is short lines of alternating dialogue –a method for building tension. This has been likened to a picture editor's method of using rapid intercutting of film clips to increase intensity in exciting moments of a mixture. The Elizabethan devised the soliloquy, generally an introspective analysis or a pondering of a future course of action, to reveal workings of the mind. In the modern period, we have devices like interior monologue. Interior Monologue substitutable sometimes as stream of consciousness is a narrative mode or device that depicts the myriad of thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind. The term was coined by William James in 1890 in his *Principles of Psychology* and the term stream of consciousness was first applied in 1918 by May Sinclair when discussing Dorothy Richardson's novel. In interior monologue, the speaker's thought processes are more often depicted as overheard in the mind that is addressed to oneself. Interior monologue always presents a character's thoughts directly without the apparent intervention of a summarizing and selecting narrator. Therefore, it does not necessarily mingle them with impressions and perceptions.

The language of Greek tragedy is verse, the customary medium for ceremonial performances. The language of Renaissance is varied and often employs prose as well verse and there is often a social differentiation, verse denoting the upper class, prose the lower class. Shakespeare did not consider it inappropriate to move from poetry to prose and back again when it suited him or from the most elevated language of the court to plain language of porters and grave diggers. Peter Arnott observes that "Shakespeare's play conspicuously delight in the word play, elaborate flights of rhetorical fancy and particularly puns, many of which have become obsolete or pronunciation have changed".(181)

In the modern period, poetry or verse gives way to prose as the playwrights bring on stage common place people in everyday pursuit of life and could only achieve verisimilitude by remaining close to conversational speech. This is proper because Diction must be appropriate to the character and the situation. The use of language in *Death of a Salesman* is entirely realistic. Miller's dialogue is carefully constructed to follow the exact speech patterns of ordinary New Yorkers. The characters often use slang and clichés such as: "I'm a dime a dozen", "you're a pal", "He's gonna flunk you" etc.

In *When the Arrow Rebounds*, the language is simple and is spiced with proverbs and idiomatic expressions. Proverbs constitute a major form of collective consciousness through which Africans communicate ideas and opinions. They occupy a commanding position in the arsenal of African cultures. In Igbo culture, proverbs are described as the palm oil with which words are eaten. In the festival of the pumpkin leaves, Ezeulu emerges from the shrine-house, his opening speech spoken entirely in proverbs and idiomatic expressions:

EZEULU an old man is never old when it comes to the dance he knows very well. The fly that struts around a mound of excrement wastes his time. The mould will always be greater than the fly. When we see a little bird dancing in the middle of the road, we must know that its drummer is in the nearby bush. The thing that beats the drum for Ngwesi is inside the ground. Darkness is so great it gives horns to a dog. He who builds a homestead before another can boast of more broken pots. It is ofo that gives rain-water the strength to pierce dry earth. The man who walks ahead of his folks spots spirits on the way. Bat said he knew his

ugliness and chose to fly by night. When the air is fouled by a man on top of a palm tree the fly gets confused. (10-11)

Music

Music, the fifth element of tragedy as ordinarily understood, is not part of every play but in the expanded sense, it encompasses all aspect of sound – pitch, rate, quality, duration, volume, actor’s voice and rhythm. According to Brockett, “music in the expanded sense includes all sound effects, the actors’ voices, songs and instrumental music”. (*The Theatre: an Introduction 46*) From the above point of view, music may be considered an important ingredient in every production.

Brockett outlines seven functions of music: Music can establish or enhance mood and create expectations; Music can establish the scheme of probability; Music can characterize; Music can be a medium for ideas; Music can condense; Music can lend variety and Music can be pleasurable in itself. (*The Theatre 47*)

Greek drama originated from the *dithyrambs* in which music and dancing were integral parts of the hymn. Consequently, in Greek tragedy, dancing and music were indispensable parts of the whole and not occasional adjuncts. This is because; the series of episode that comprised the action were joined or separated by the choral odes: The *Stasima*.

The Elizabethan’s and the modern playwrights also used music. Throughout *Death of a Salesman*, we find the song of the flute as the underlying musical themes. In *When the Arrow Rebounds*, music played an important role as it is noted in the stage directions of Movement one, that, “the Ikolo beats unceasingly, sometimes punctuated by loud songs and war chants coming from the backstage (...) The drum rises in brilliance, and the ekwe now joins the ikolo to form a frenzied rhythm”. (9-10) In African theatre, music continues to play an essential part in the total effect.

Spectacle

Spectacle refers to all the visual aspects of the production: Scenery, lighting, costume, make-up and blockings. The several functions of spectacle ranges from: giving information, aiding characterization, establishing scheme of probability, to establishing mood and atmosphere. Aristotle suggests that “the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the machinist than that of the poet”.

In the Greek period, the stage effect was vastly enhanced by the entrance of the chorus (parados) which marched in with pomp. Renaissance audiences loved to be amazed by special effects and scenic transformation. They were charmed by theatrical displays of ostentatious wealth: the dance, pageantry, pantomime, clowns; sword fighting and crowd scenes remain virtually stimulating and theatrically effective. Thus the visual and the spectacular theatre overwhelmed the literary theatre.

The Greeks and the Elizabethans did not use too much scenery, as virtually no representation of locale is required except supplied by the architecture itself. They however made extensive use of striking costumes and the action of the actors. In the modern period, spectacle was given a new importance in production because of naturalism and realism’s belief in environment as a determinant of human behavior. Miller puts an enormous amount of emphasis on the spectacular staging of the play to produce emotional effects in the audience.

Greek tragic playwrights kept bloody and death scenes off the stage. Although Greek tragedies concern themselves with death, madness, battle and mutilation, the bloodier events take place off stage. We are led up to them but we do not see the events themselves. Stage death is conspicuously avoided. In the whole of

Greek tragedy, only on two occasions does death actually occur on stage. The reason for absence of stage death is simply to avoid the reduction of the speaking actors, since they are restricted to a maximum of three. Thus, the customary practice was to have the character die offstage and his body replaced by a dummy. In *Oedipus the King*, King Laius' death is kept as a previous action, Jocasta's suicide is committed offstage and then reported; Oedipus' picking of his eyeballs with needles is done offstage and the manifestation brought to the stage. Also in *Antigone*, battles and deaths of Polyneices and Eteocles are previous actions, while Eurydice's, Haemon's and Antigone's deaths are reported. The messenger scene is a standard part of Greek drama because scenes of extreme violence and death take place offstage although results of the actions might be shown.

The Elizabethan audiences seemed quite comfortable with the sight of blood on stage. In *Macbeth* and *Othello* for example, the murder of Banquo, Macduff's family and Desdemona's murder are done in the glare of the audience.

In Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman's suicide was reported, while in *When the Arrow Rebounds*, the result of Obika's death was shown on stage.

THE EFFECT OF TRAGEDY

Aristotle expresses the idea of *Catharsis* in chapter VI of *Poetics*. According to him, "Tragedy then is an imitation of an action that is serious (...) in the form of an action, not of narrative through pity and fear affecting the proper catharsis of these emotions". (36) Endless debates have centred on the term catharsis, which Aristotle unfortunately did not define. Consequently, there have been several interpretations of Catharsis: Purgative, Purifying, Cognitive and Clarification. J. D. Nuttal views Catharsis as a "medical purgation, as a treatment which uses fear and pity in order to rid the system of the emotions themselves, which are an impurity". (6) He sees Catharsis as a purifying mechanism which reforms the spectator's soul and as an educative tool that teaches lessons leaving them better people for their experience. According to this interpretation, Aristotle may have been offering an alternative to Plato's charge that the dramatic poets were dangerous to society because they incited the passion. Jonathan Lear, however favours *catharsis* as both an emotional and cognitive response. In his view, "*catharsis* is the relief of releasing these tragic emotions in a safe environment". (325) Lear maintains that it is a combination of feeling, fear and pity while simultaneously being able to enjoy the sensations because one knows that the tragic events are remote. Leon Golden was the first writer in English to translate and interpret Aristotle's term *catharsis* as clarification as against the traditional views of catharsis as purgation and purification. Critics in this group see catharsis as the audience's intellectual, emotional or ethical clarification of the hero's tragic experiences. Clarification then means an objective lesson in how these things come about or the result of learning something about the events forming the tragic plot. In modern times, catharsis is being interpreted as a purely artistic or structural term. A noted exponent of this view is Gerald Else who has suggested that catharsis occurs not in the spectator but in the plot, as it harmonizes disruptive elements within itself. Else and Hardison prefer to think of *catharsis* not as the effect of tragedy on the spectator but as the resolution of dramatic tension within the plot. The dramatist depicts incidents which arouse Pity and Fear for the protagonist then during the course of the action, he resolves the major conflicts bringing the plot to a logical and foreseeable conclusion. Building on Else's discussion, Larry Brown argues that it is uncharacteristic of Aristotle to define tragedy in terms of audience psychology because throughout the *Poetics*, he focuses on dramatic forms, not on its effects on viewers. The debate remained unresolved. Clearly, each of the interpretations grows from a different view of tragedy as a whole, but all agree upon catharsis as a beneficial, uplifting experience, whether psychological, moral, and intellectual or some combination of

these. However, all the interpretations of catharsis have a common focus on Pity and Fear which are aroused in the spectators. The concern of this paper here will be more centred upon identifying the emotions that cause *catharsis*: Pity and Fear.

The most significant element that distinguishes tragedy from other forms of drama is the tragic effect of pity and fear and not necessarily *catharsis* because, in the *Politics*, Aristotle allows that other emotions may propel catharsis when people listen to music. To understand the tragic effect, it is necessary to emphasize Aristotle's words Pity and Fear. Pity is not contemptuous. Rather, it is equality, a sharing of grief. We enter into the experience of another through our sympathy and our fellow feeling. Pity is what forges the connection between the audience and the character whose life is so separated that it will never affect one's own. It is the audience's emotional interest in the character's well-being that produces audience response based on the events and actions of the play. Fear derives from the anxiety that our own fortune might change in the same way; that we might find ourselves in similar circumstances, or that we might make a mistake that unpredictably precipitates our own fall. This Pity and Fear the researcher has argued before is not aroused by the fall of the tragic hero but by the action of the play. Some have said that the hero may fall because he errs as well as because he transgresses and that our pity is elicited because of his undeserved misfortune. What for example is undeserved about Macbeth's misfortune? As a matter of fact, he deserves more than what befell him.

Aristotle defines tragedy by its particular purpose, which he describes as "effecting Pity and Fear the *catharsis* of such emotions". While much of his analysis addresses the mechanics of plot, character and language, this critical passage suggests that the first concern of tragedy is audience reception. The expectation of tragedy is that it produces feelings of Pity and Fear in the audience. A pointed depiction of tragic events or circumstances is rendered in the plays under study drawing out a kind of effect and fulfilment of ideal tragedy.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, desperation of the chorus and their cry of help in the beginning is the first time we experience pity and fear. Oedipus makes all effort to save his people and in his search, he discovers his true ancestry and that he has fulfilled the very destiny he has spent his life running away from: killing his father and marrying his mother. We experience the revelation of Oedipus's crimes with him. Despite our prior knowledge, we feel the horror that grips him in the moment of proof. The horror of tragedy is emphasized by his mother's suicide. Finally, Oedipus brutal act of blinding himself and the touching farewell of his children –siblings and the chorus's final statement that one should "(...) count no one of the race of man happy until he has crossed life's border, free from pain" (51) all inspire the pity and fear that Aristotle recognized as the hallmark of tragic effect.

In *Antigone*, the audience experiences pity and fear for a variety of characters. Antigone's pitiful situation of standing alone against a strong king causes the audience to feel pity for her. Even her only sister Ismene points out to her that they are only but women:

ISMENE: Let us not forget two things – that we were born
 Women, and so not meant to fight with men:
 And then, that we must do what our masters tell
 Us----
 Obey in this, and other things far worse
 I, then, will ask the kingdom of the dead

To pardon me, since I am no free agent,
I will yield to the powers that be. There is no sense
In meddling in things outside our sphere. (70)

Creon's judgement triggers a string of tragic actions that elicit pity and fear. Antigone has just been immured. Creon and others come to the cave, they find Haemon holding Antigone's corpse, he later stabs himself and lays beside Antigone in a pool of blood. Eurydice's also commits suicide. We feel for Creon when he realizes that what he did was wrong

CREON: Nobody else can bear the guilt,
 No-one can take the blame from me.
 I killed you, I, your unhappy father,
 This is the truth.
 Servants, take me away from this place,
 Let me stay not a moment longer.
 Creon has ceased to exist. (86)

Creon believes that persecuting all those accused of treason and those who bury the body would be the best for the kingdom. He follows his natural urge to what he thinks is right, but this eventually leads to his downfall.

In *Macbeth*, the audience feels throughout the play that Macbeth's killing of innocent Duncan is unjust. Murdering a guest while he sleeps under your roof constitutes one of the greatest breeches of social contract. Equally grievous is the murder of Banquo and the innocent and helpless woman and children: Macduff's wife and children. We feel pity for Macbeth only at the end when it dawns on him that the temptation of ambition robs him of the essence of existence as a human being, and leaves nothing but discontent and a worthless life. Macbeth gathers this idea in his soliloquy when he said that "life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage". (219) The death of Macbeth is the most satisfying way to purge the emotions associated with his behaviour.

In *Othello*, Desdemona is in a precarious position, for her marriage to Othello has alienated her not only from her father but also from her homeland. Othello's belief that the lovely pure Desdemona could ever be unfaithful to him is indeed pitiful. Othello was deceived by Iago who perceived Othello's nature and discovers the best way to manipulate it. He describes Othello thus:

IAGO: The Moor is of a free nature
 That thinks men honest that to be so,
 And will as tenderly be led by th'nose
 As Asses are. (54)

The staging of the conversation between Iago and Cassio that Othello witnesses is another unfortunate event. The timing of Othello's eavesdropping so terribly misleads his understanding of the conversation. The death of Desdemona, an innocent person contributes significantly to the emotional landscape by Shakespeare. We feel pity and fear for Desdemona. The increasing desperation of her entreaties to Othello to preserve her life is also designed to induce pity:

DESDEMONA: And have you mercy too! I never did

Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio,
(...) O banish me my lord, but kill me not! (123)

Desdemona's love for Othello was absolute, so his death at the end gives a justified end to the tragedy. In *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman's life is an example of a true downfall which affects those close to him. The common man indeed can relate to Willy Loman. Much of his suffering is due to the nature of American society that is highly competitive. Willy Loman was under the illusion that his career as a salesman would take him to the top and he would face no difficulties even in his old age. He has such high hopes for himself that he continues to persevere through his strenuous job and he believes that he is capable and worthy of success. Loman does not wish to submit to failure because "failure by Willy's standard is a great crime as incest is to Oedipus". (Landy: 977) His underlying fear of being displaced is the real tragedy. Willy Loman consciously chose to invest his last asset – his life, for the price of the insurance money. His ultimate vision is that the hopes he placed in the American dream were misguided and that his dream of success can be achieved only through and after death. Miller uses the eating of the orange and throwing away the peel metaphor to critique the ruthless nature of capitalistic system that carelessly discards men like Willy Loman after they have been used to benefit the firm and are no longer needed. Willy tells Howard:

WILLY: I am talking about your father,

There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see – I put thirty-fours into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit (...) (54).

It is significant that when *Death of a Salesman*, was first staged in America, grown men in the audience broke down in tears, as the play was so realistic they could relate to it in such a way that they could see themselves in Willy Loman's shoes, and could see what could possibly lay ahead for them. Miller wanted to show that tragedy can affect all of us, and not just in the way Aristotle shows.

In *When the Arrow Rebounds*, Ezeulu is misunderstood by his own people in his attitude to the colonial administration. He is insulted by elders like Nwaka and Ezeidemmili who should know better. Wintabottom's miscalculation in offering Ezeulu the position of a chief, triggers many tragic results, because, Ezeulu's refusal is considered an insult. We are moved to pity at the tragedy of a man destroyed by powers or forces beyond his understanding; the suffering of Umuaro community and the death of innocent Obika. Finally, the effect of pity and fear in witnessing the disintegration Ezeulu's family, Umuaro religion and even his sanity cannot be overemphasized.

The basic difference between tragedy and other genres such as comedy and epic is, according to Aristotle, tragic pleasure of pity and fear the audience feel watching a tragedy. This is the stand of Patho-Cathartic perspective, the new theory proposed by Maryisabella Ada Ezeh in her thesis 'The Changing Faces of tragedy': that witnessing the tragedy and suffering of the characters on stage, the emotions of pity and fear are aroused in the audience; the purgation of such emotions and feelings make them relieved and they emerge as better human beings than they were, thus, for a play to be classified as tragedy, it must produce the tragic effect of pity and fear.

CONCLUSION

This paper in a nutshell highlights the fundamental similarities and differences between the tragedies of the Classical, the Renaissance and the Modern ages. It discusses the overall significance of changes in convention which tragedy like every other genre has undergone from the ancient period.

The Greek tragedy retained the choric song and dance of the ancient festivals in addition to the spoken monologue and dialogue and no attempt is made by the use of subsidiary scenes and minor characters to set the main action against the background of ordinary life. The number of characters is small, the action is normally confined to one place and time and actual events such as wars or assassinations were narrated rather than performed on stage. Greek tragedy focuses on the action and plot and concentrated on the lives of kings and princes.

In the Renaissance period, there was a shift from a pre-ordained fate to the psychology and ability of the individual. The spirit of individualism and humanism was much upheld in and is evident in the tragedies written in this period. Shakespeare's plots are complex, composed of several incidents across an expanse of time, and involving a dozen or more characters hence, Shakespeare disregarded the unities. The plots are involved often with subplots and counterplots. The language is varied and often employs prose as well as verse and there is often an intermixture of comic scenes in the tragedies. From Seneca, the Renaissance theatre picked up the device of soliloquy and asides, bombast and rhetorical fireworks. Shakespeare's tragic heroes conform to many of Aristotle's Precepts: They may have royal blood, may be renowned military leaders or both but he, however, combines low and high born characters.

Modern tragedy depicts ordinary people in tragic situations. The hero is usually a victim of social forces, and is faced with difficult situations. The central idea of modern drama is common place. They flow out of the realities of life, everything therefore becomes the subject of tragedy and everybody is accepted as a worthy character of tragedy. Normally, all the central characters in modern tragedies die or are destroyed in the end. The plain language spoken in real life is used in the dialogue. It is obvious from the consideration of the three great periods of tragedy that no theatrical period ever repeats itself as there are differences among them as there must be since the theatre of any given period reflects the world in which it exists.

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