

Tragedy and Comedy as Literary Forms

Essay

Tragedy and comedy were the most widespread literary forms in Ancient Greek theatre. There exist several literary works in these genres even these days, but those which were written by the Ancient Greek writers are the most valuable. Apart from tragedy and comedy, the Athenian writers also composed satyr plays, but they have never been taken seriously by the population. Generally, tragedy was written for better than average people who spoke an elevated language (those could be kings, heroes, gods, and the like). Comedy, in its turn, was compiled for simpler people who spoke the everyday language and even for those who were below average. The main differences between tragedy and comedy are in their content and the effect they produce on the audience; Greeks used these literary forms as the embodiment of their faith, history, and culture; they are still a part of modern people's lives and are used in movies and television as a source of wisdom and inspiration.

Main body

To begin with, comedy and tragedy differ in the effect they produce on the readers, as well as in content in general. Both tragedy and comedy have originated in Ancient Greece thousands of years ago. Despite all the differences in these genres, their primary purpose was entertaining people who visited Greek theatres. Tragedy has originated fifty years earlier than comedy, around 535 B.C. (McDonald and Walton 21); this happened because Greeks regarded laughter as not the most important human impulse (which, by the way, they were wrong about).

Perhaps one of the main differences between tragedy and comedy is that the former evokes emotions in the audience, making them feel, suffer, and live through the unpleasant moments together with the characters, while the latter makes the reader think about life and such eternal notions as wisdom, wealth, friendship, love, unfaithfulness, etc. Another difference between them is that someone inevitably dies at the end of the tragedy, whereas comedy may be characterized by a happy ending.

What's more, these literary forms were not only the means of entertainment for ancient Greeks but served as an expression of their devotion to Gods and their culture. Comedies and tragedies were the Greeks' perpetuation of their history and their paying tribute of respect to Gods, who, as it is known, were numerous in Greece. They are based on Greek mythology and usually tell about the characters who aim to disclose the nature of Gods and to find out the meaning of life. There is hardly any comedy or tragedy that does not mention the name of Zeus or any other kind of mythological character. For instance, Euripides' "Medea" abounds with these names.

The characters often turn to Zeus in desperation or happiness: "O Zeus! O Justice, daughter of Zeus! O glorious Sun! Now I am on the road to victory; now there's hope!" (Euripides and Vellacott 58) Apart from this, the book itself is based on such mythological characters as Hercules,

Perseus, Hera, Orestes, Amphitryon, etc. This shows that comedies and tragedies express the reality of ancient Greeks' lives pointing at their faith in Gods and the values of their lives.

Finally, comedies and tragedies still relate to the lives of modern people and are regularly used in movies and television. These literary forms are an integral part of people's lives because they still can feel and share their emotions with others. Moreover, there is still much to learn from the ancient Greek comedies and tragedies, because wisdom is the notion that goes through the ages without losing its value. In the modern world, it is often the case that people fail to detect truth because they got used to that everything is complicated; comedies and tragedies may teach to discover truth through simplicity and this is where their relationship to the lives of modern people consists in.

Movies and television still have these literary forms as the basics for entertaining people; most of the movies are either tragedies or comedies since these genres are most widely accepted by people. Even when shooting fiction or fantasy, any director still leaves place either for tragedy or for comedy, because the movie seems boring without them. As far as television is concerned, modern TV shows are either comic (mostly family and youth) or tragic (about lost relatives or unhappy love). Thus, tragedy and comedy find their embodiment even in the lives of modern people.

In sum, tragedy and comedy will always remain a part of human life. The major difference between them lies in the effect they produce on the audience with tragedy making people feel the dramatic events together with the characters of the play and with comedy making the audience think where the character went wrong. These literary forms helped Greeks perpetuate their culture and their Gods; even the modern reader knows most of the gods these people used to believe in. Tragedy and comedy are still used by modern society; they help people discover the truth and are part of modern cinematography and television.

Works Cited

Euripides and Vellacott, Phillip. *Medea and Other Plays*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1963.

McDonald, Marianne, and Walton, Michael J. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.