

# Poetic diction in shakespearean tragedies

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Aristotle's Poetics defines the nature of tragic drama, discusses the six essential elements of drama, states his opinion on the best type of tragic plot, and suggests the most effective means to arouse essential emotions such as pity and fear. He presents here the elaborate structure of justice of virtue rewarded and villain punished, broadly speaking the poetic justice.

Now since in the finest kind of tragedy the structure should be complex and not simple, and since it should also be a representation of terrible and piteous events (that being the special mark of this type of imitation), in the first place, it is evident that good men ought not to be shown passing from prosperity to misfortune, for this does not inspire either pity or fear, but only revulsion; nor evil men rising from ill fortune to prosperity, for this is the most untragic plot of all—? it lacks every requirement, in that it neither elicits human sympathy nor stirs pity or fear.

And again, neither should an extremely wicked man be seen falling from prosperity into misfortune, for a plot so constructed might indeed call forth human sympathy, but would not excite pity or fear, since the first is felt for a person whose misfortune is undeserved and the second for someone like ourselves—? pity for the man suffering undeservedly, fear for the man like ourselves—? and hence neither pity nor fear would be aroused in this case.

We are left with the man whose place is between these extremes. Such is the man who on the one hand is not pre-eminent in virtue and justice, and yet on the other hand does not fall into misfortune through vice or depravity, but falls because of some mistake.

By poetic justice means that the virtuous should be rewarded and the evil doer will be punished. It means that prosperity and adversity are distributed in proportion to the merits of the agents. Judging as such there is no poetic justice in Shakespeare's tragedies. Prosperity and adversity are not properly distributed in his tragedies. Such 'poetic justice' is in flagrant contradiction with the facts of life, and it is absent from Shakespeare's tragic picture of life. Thus Dr. Johnson accuses that, in the plays of Shakespeare, especially in his tragedies there is a lack of poetic justice, that he sacrifices virtue to convenience, and that the major figures suffer more than they deserve because of their faults. The punishment inflicted on them is disproportionate to their sins or wrongs. In actual life this sort of poetic justice is not possible.

Shakespeare was a realist and therefore, poetic justice in its pure form is not present in his plays. In fact, Shakespeare mastered the knowledge of his time and stands out as the greatest interpreter of the ideals of Elizabethan Europe. There is no poetic justice in the deaths of Ophelia, Cordelia, Lear, Gloucester, and Banquo. However, THERE IS POETIC JUSTICE IN THE DEATHS OF GONERIL, REGAN, ORNWALL, AND ADMUND. But the murder of lady Macduff and her children is most tragic unjust. In the same way, in Hamlet, there is no poetic justice in so many deaths on stage. However, the deaths of Hamlet's mother, his uncle, and even of Ophelia's father can be justified as coming under poetic justice. But the deaths of Hamlet and even of Ophelia's brother do not fall under poetic justice.

Again King Lear illustrates in its close the conventional poetic justice that demands the triumph of the righteous cause and the downfall of the wicked.

But there is not lacking that more subtle justice, so impressive in “? Lear”? because unaccompanied by the temporal reward of the good, which reveals itself in the subduing of character to what it works in. Far more terrible than the defeat and death of Macbeth is the picture of the degradation of his nature, when he appears in the scene before the battle like a beast at bay.

Hamlet gears up to be a traditional bloody revenge play -? and then it stops. The bulk of the play deals not with Hamlet’? s ultimately successful vengeance on his father’? s murderer, but on Hamlet’? s inner struggle to take action. The play’? s conclusion has a typical amount of gore, but Hamlet is certainly not a typical revenge tragedy. Hamlet talks about revenge as a worthy goal, but his mysterious delay hints that he may actually feel otherwise. The validity -? or the usefulness -? of revenge itself is thrown into question by the play.