Aristotle's Ideas about Tragedy

1. "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself;"
This means that a good tragedy deals with one issue that is very "serious." You can't have a tragedy about something
trivial like breaking a fingernail. "Magnitude" here means great importance. The issue has to be serious and very,
very important. That's why a lot of tragedies deal with someone's death. "Complete in itself" means that the play
must stick to the o ne issue; otherwise, the audience will get lost in the p lot.
2. "in appropriate and pleasurable language:"
Ancient Greek tragedy had a chorus whose role was to comment on the action of the play. The chorus sometimes
sang their part. Aristotle said that the language should be easy to listen to. It should have rhythm and also good
harmony for the lines that were sung.
3. "in a dramatic rather than narrative form;"
To narrate a story is simply to tell the story, like telling a friend what happened over the weekend. In a play, the story
must be dramatized or acted out.
4. "with incidents arousing pity and fear,"
In a tragedy, the events or episodes in the play should lead the audience to feel very sorry for the main character--the
tragic hero. The audience should also feel afraid for the hero as he moves toward a destructive end.
5. "wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions."
As the play moves along, the events should build up the emotions of pity and fear. A catharsis is a purging, or
cleansing of the emotions --a release o f tension. In a tragedy, this is often a moment o f revelation w hen the tragic
hero "falls flat on his face," and the audience can finally "explode."

The Characterization of Tragic Hero According to Aristotle

The tragic hero is a man of noble stature. He is not an ordinary man, but a man with outstanding quality and greatness about him. His own destruction is for a greater cause or principle.

Common characteristics of a tragic hero
According to Aristotle:

1. Usually of noble birth

2. Hamartia – a.k.a. the tragic flaw that eventually leads to his downfall.

3. Peripeteia – a reversal of fortune brought about by the hero's tragic flaw

4. His actions result in an increase of self- awareness and self-knowledge

5. The audience must feel pity and fear for this character.

Plot Structure

The plot of a story consists of the sequence of events that occur in a story. In popular fiction, the plot is considered to be the most important element of the story, and most plots follow a structured formula containing the following elements in the following order:

Exposition: orients the reader to the setting of the story (time and place) and introduces the characters.

Conflict: the primary obstacle that prevents the protagonist (main character) from reaching his or her goal. The most common conflicts are man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. society, and man vs. himself.

Rising Action: the complications that occur within the story, prolonging and developing the central conflict.

Climax: the point of greatest tension in a story; the point of no return. Think of the climax as being on the top of the roller coaster in the front car, just before you begin your descent.

Falling Action: the result of the conflict is revealed in the falling action. To continue the roller coaster metaphor, the falling action would occur as you begin the descent down the hill.

The Elements of Drama

Relationships

Relationships are central to all dramatic action:

- relationships between people
- the relationship between people and ideas
- the relationship between people and the environment

Tension

Tension is the force that drives the drama. There are four main types of dramatic tension:

- the tension of the task
- the tension of relationships
- the tension of surprise
- the tension of mystery

Focus

Exploring one aspect of the situation which we wish to develop and staying clear about our intention - driving our character and associated contents forward in the performance.

Time & Place

Dramatists need to carefully choose the place where the action takes place as this can greatly affect the events and tensions within the drama.

Aspects of place include:

- the range of characters
- closed and open settings
- contrasting settings
- messages of place

In drama we ask ourselves the following Time in action:

- closed and open time frames
- messages of period
- associations of period
- constraints of period

- exploring causes
- exploring effects

Language

In drama we express our ideas, our feelings and our needs to each other by:

- the words we say
- the way we say them
- our body language

The language of the drama:

- the situation
- the roles
- the relationships
- the images

Movement

- images in action
- stillness and contrast

Mood

This is the feeling or atmosphere that is created by, and emerges through, the dramatic action.

Symbol

Symbols are what the drama makes you understand - they sum up the meaning of the play, sometimes even on a subconscious level. Symbols can be expressed through language, movement, visual images.

We can see symbol through:

- gestures
- objects

Types of Drama

Tragedy

"A tragedy is the imitation of a n action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in appropriate and pleasurable language;... in a dramatic rather than narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions."

Comedy

Comedy is a word that Greeks and Romans confined to descriptions of stage-plays with happy endings.

Melodrama

A sensational dramatic piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions.

Morality

Representation of abstract ideas that are tinged with religious overtones

Context

Born in Canterbury in 1564, the same year as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe was an actor, poet, and playwright during the reign of Britain's Queen Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603). Marlowe attended Corpus Christi College at Cambridge University and received degrees in 1584 and 1587. Traditionally, the education that he received would have prepared him to become a clergyman, but Marlowe chose not to join the ministry. For a time, Cambridge even wanted to withhold his degree, apparently suspecting him of having converted to Catholicism, a forbidden faith in late-sixteenth-century England, where Protestantism was the state-supported religion. Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council intervened on his behalf, saying that Marlowe had "done her majesty good service" in "matters touching the benefit of the country." This odd sequence of events has led some to theorize that Marlowe worked as a spy for the crown, possibly by infiltrating Catholic communities in France.

After leaving Cambridge, Marlowe moved to London, where he became a playwright and led a turbulent, scandal-plagued life. He produced seven plays, all of which were immensely popular. Among the most well known of his plays are Tamburlaine, The Jew of Malta, and Doctor Faustus. In his writing, he pioneered the use of blank verse—nonrhyming lines of iambic pentameter—which many of his contemporaries, including William Shakespeare, later adopted. In 1593, however, Marlowe's career was cut short. After being accused of heresy (maintaining beliefs contrary to those of an approved religion), he was arrested and put on a sort of probation. On May 30, 1593, shortly after being released, Marlowe became involved in a tavern brawl and was killed when one of the combatants stabbed him in the head. After his death, rumors were spread accusing him of treason, atheism, and homosexuality, and some people speculated that the tavern brawl might have been the work of government agents. Little evidence to support these allegations has come to light, however.
Doctor Faustus was probably written in 1592, although the exact date of its composition is uncertain, since it was not published until a decade later. The idea of an individual selling his or her soul to the devil for knowledge is an old motif in Christian folklore, one that had become attached to the historical persona of Johannes Faustus, a disreputable astrologer who lived in Germany sometime in the early 1500s. The immediate source of Marlowe's play seems to be the anonymous German work Historia von D. Iohan Fausten of 1587, which was translated into English in 1592, and from which Marlowe lifted the bulk of the plot for his drama. Although there had been literary representations of Faust prior to Marlowe's play, Doctor Faustus is the first famous version of the story. Later versions include the long and famous poem Faust by the nineteenth-century Romantic writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as well as operas by Charles Gounod and Arrigo Boito and a symphony by Hector Berlioz. Meanwhile, the phrase "Faustian bargain" has entered the English lexicon, referring to any deal made for a short-term gain with great costs in the long run.

Themes

Doctor Faustus Theme of Sin

Just as Faustus refuses to take religious issues seriously, he laughs at the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins in Act 2, Scene 3 of Doctor Faustus. But really, buddy, they're no laughing matter, which becomes all the more clear when the Sins start to tell Dr. F a bit more about themselves. This parade of sins should be a warning to Faustus to repent, but he has already decided he'd rather serve the devil than God, all so he can grab himself some wealth and power before his soul hits the road. Sounds like sin to Shmoop.

Doctor Faustus Theme of Philosophical Viewpoints: Predestination

Does man have a choice about whether or not he will reach heaven? Or is the fate of his soul decided from the get-go, with him powerless to change it? At first, it seems like *Doctor Faustus* is clearly in the latter camp. Our good-turned-bad doctor thinks he's damned no matter what he does. But as the play goes on, Faustus wavers, wondering if he still has time to repent, and if his sin is forgivable. The play never comes down on one or the other side of the debate, sometimes portraying Faustus's fall as his own choice, at other times letting him off the hook. In the end though, it just might be a little bit of both. Faustus's fall has been caused by his *choice* to believe that he's damned. That causes him to refuse to repent, and refusing to repent is the one sin that's truly unforgiveable.

Doctor Faustus Theme of Religion

At the beginning of *Doctor Faustus*, the not-so-good doctor thinks the study of religion is a plain old waste of time. But we're betting that by the end of it, he'll be singing a different tune altogether. See, through all his conjuring exploits and exotic travels, Faustus just can't escape the subject of religion.

Doctor Faustus Theme of the Supernatural

Faustus hands over his soul for the ability to perform magic. Although he imagines using magic to make himself as powerful as a god and as wealthy as a king, when it comes right down to it Faustus's magic often amounts to little more than fancy tricks. He uses it to make the images of dead people appear in order to amuse himself and his friends, or to humiliate people, including peasants who have done nothing to harm him. And the townsfolk who use magic do silly things like steal dishes and bogart some booze. In the end, magic in *Doctor Faustus*, however incredible, appears to be no more useful than the man who wields it.

Doctor Faustus Theme of Wisdom and Knowledge

At the beginning of *Doctor Faustus,* Faustus takes a closer look at the collected wisdom of centuries of scholarship and has only this to say: codswallop! Instead, he turns to magic not only for the power and wealth it can bring him, but also because of the forbidden knowledge it promises to reveal to him. In the end, Faustus doesn't care about the knowledge itself—just what it can do for him, and that kind of thinking is exactly what winds him up in a pact with Lucifer. So while Faustus may be knowledgeable, the play suggests, he's certainly not wise.

Doctor Faustus Theme of Wealth

As Faustus does the whole should-he-or-shouldn't-he-deal-with-the-devil calculation (here's an idea, Faustus: you shouldn't), the wealth that such a deal can bring him factors considerably into his fuzzy math. He knows that, with Mephistopheles's help, he can get his grubby hands on the treasures of exotic places like India, Asia, and the Americas. Plus, he could use his considerable power to cheat peasants out of their money and possessions. Beyond demonstrating the cravenness of his character, Faustus's desire for wealth and his willingness to sell his soul to the devil shows us that in *Doctor Faustus* wealth and salvation don't exactly go hand in hand.

Doctor Faustus Theme of Power

A big motivator for Faustus's handing his soul over to the devil is his that he's jonesing for some power, big time. But here's the rub: in order to gain that power, Faustus has to give it all away—to Lucifer. Ultimately, the power Faustus dreams of could never be his. The power to rule not just men but all of creation belongs only to God in the world of *Doctor Faustus*. But the not-so-good doctor is not the only one in the play who has such high ambitions. Pope Adrian, too, uses his power to make all the world "stoop" (3.1.158). And we know that Lucifer fell from heaven because of his lust for power. So the Pope and Faustus are probably destined to wind up right where Lucifer is—in hell.