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One Persons Pain, Another’s Laughter

Authors can use various methods within their work to convey certain messages or feelings to the reader. Tragedies and comedies are just two techniques used to convey different emotions, like joy or extreme sadness, to its readers. In a tragedy, the very thing the reader hopes will not happen is the very thing that occurs. On the other hand, comedies tend to lift a reader’s spirits and putting a smile on their face. Although this explains these two particular techniques on the surface, what is it that the author is truly trying to convey with these two very distinct ways of writing? When an author kills off the reader’s favorite character, it cannot be simply because the author wants to see their readers suffer, so what is the ulterior motive behind such cruel actions? A similar question can be asked about comedies. On the surface these written works are funny, yes, but do they convey anything, or are they merely pointless and could be described as a quick, easy read?

*Oedipus Rex,* written by Sophocles, is a very well known example of a tragedy. The story revolves around a man, Oedipus, and the prophecy he will one day fulfill. In order to prevent his tragic fate, steps are taken to thwart specific events, but, as a result, one could argue that it was those very precautionary measures that can be pinpointed as the origins that bring those very same problems to life. Throughout this play, the author uses a lot of dramatic irony, which as a result, causes the reader that much more frustration. From early on in the book, things do not look like they will end well for Oedipus, yet readers are used to “happily ever afters”. They are still counting on their cookie-cutter ending. This, however, is not something that you will find in a tragic play. A tragic play will mess with the reader’s emotions and sometimes will even throw its readers on a road they did not think was an option. There are many times in the play in which the readers are yelling at Oedipus to piece everything together because it is all right in front of his face. At one point after Oedipus has already married Jocasta, she tells Oedipus about her son’s prophecy. After Jocasta reveals the truth about her son, Oedipus reveals that he has the same prophecy. The prophecy stated, “I should wed my mother, and produce a race intolerable for men to see, and be my natural father’s murderer” (Sophocles 29). From this point in time, any shred of hope the reader had left for a happy ending vanishes. At the end of the play, after Oedipus and Jocasta both realize the truth, Jocasta kills herself, and Oedipus, finding her body, “Not once, but many times, he raised his hand and stabbed his eyes; so that from both of them the blood ran down his face, not drop by drop, but all at once, in the dark shower if gore.” (Sophocles 45). The tragic truth of a tragedy is that happy endings are non-existent, everything falls apart and, after that downfall, things can never right themselves again. Tragedies are nowhere near the predictable fairytales readers are used to. Comedies, on the other hand, tend to contain some aspects that are quite the opposite.

*Lysistrata*, a play written by Aristophanes, is the exact opposite of *Oedipus Rex. Lysistrata* is classified as a comedy, and for good reason. In Aristophanes’ play, the women are revolting because they believe the men of their society are acting childish. The women believe that the war should have been over a long time ago, so Lysistrata, the main character, decides to do something about it. Unlike written works that are categorized as tragedies, comedies give you that cookie-cutter ending the reader hopes for. Although this certainly spares the reader from heartache, it also provides a very predictable story line. When the reader first learns that the women are going to go on strike, it is fairly clear that in the end they are going to get what they want. Lysistratas’ last speech in the play is, “All is for the best; and now, Laconians, take your wives away home with you, and you, Athenians, yours. May husbands live happily with wife and wife with husband. Dance, dance, to celebrate our bliss, and let us be heedful to avoid like mistakes for the future.” (Aristophanes 54). Even down to the last page most everything works out in the characters favors. Another aspect of comedies is, of course, humor. Comedic relief is a major determining factor of a comedy. *Lysistrata* is filled with hidden innuendos and sex jokes. In fact, on the second page of the book the reader will find “sex joke number one”. “About a big affair. And is it thick too? Yes indeed, it is both big and great.” (Aristophanes 2) This is the first of many jokes spread throughout the pages of this play. The author took a topic, war, which is not very humorous at all, and made it into something that people would read and enjoy. This is a very interesting technique in that, if taken the wrong way, might seem offensive, degrading the war to that of a joking matter. However, the author most likely meant to send a message. The author is trying to convey that in a time of great stress, he could provide some relief. This would take the people’s mind off of the tragedies that were going on in the world around them. For some it provides comic relief, but it also provides publicity to a major issue the world is facing.

It is easy to know what makes up a certain kind of story, but finding the deeper meaning or reason behind that technique is sometimes difficult. Why is it that as readers, even though we go in, most of the time, aware that the story is not going to pan out, we still sit down and read it? Why is it that even though people have seen, read, or at least heard about the story of Romeo and Juliet, still swarm to see the latest rendition of it? Part of it is that somewhere deep down people hope that maybe in one version it will end like they want it too, and they can see the characters live “happily ever after”. People also tend to draw parallels from their lives to those in a book or movie. If the lives of the characters do not work out then it does not give the reader much hope for their own life. A tragedy’s main goal is to serve as emotional education. They act as an example of how to react to certain situations, especially bad ones. In addition, they serve as a reminder of what is right or wrong and the punishments that could occur if you were to go against those values. Contrasting to that, one can also ask why is it that people enjoy comedies. Comedies allow the reader to escape whatever it is that they may be dealing with in their life and focus on that of someone else’s. Humans tend to find the misery of others funny, as long as it does not happen to them. Comedies pick apart the absurdities that hold a society together and even mocks the social norm. Authors purposefully make fun of serious issues that people are facing because not only does it make it easier for the people to talk about, but it also bring light to the situation. When put in a joking manner people find these topics easier to swallow, but it also gives those issues lots of publicity.

Tragedies and comedies both convey a powerful message to their readers. Back in ancient Greek culture, everything revolved around the gods. The people used the gods as an explanation for everything and were constantly worried about angering them. The people used the tragedies as a way to set an example; to show them what was socially acceptable and not. In our society now, people are very humanistic and do not blame the issues we face on gods. Instead of blaming gods, people tend to place the blame on themselves or other people around them. Although tragedies can be depressing, people tend to relate to the events that occur through the story. Comedies, on the other hand, allow readers to step out side of their own world and take a breather, allowing people to forget about their own issues, if only for a minute.

Works Cited

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