**Shakespearean Tragedy Notes**

Aristotle defined tragedy as the “imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself,” in the medium of poetic language, and in the manner of dramatic rather than narrative presentation, incorporating “incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions.”

Catharsis - in Greek is “purgation” or “purification” It is an outpouring of emotion for the main character

Many tragic representations of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed but relieved or even exalted (Catharsis)

The tragic hero will most effectively evoke both our pity and our terror if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly evil.

The tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is “better than we are” (of higher moral worth)

The tragic hero is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of a mistaken act, to which he is led by his hamartia (or tragic flaw)

The tragic hero moves us to pity because, since he is not an evil man, his misfortune is greater than he deserves, but he moves us also to fear because we recognize similar possibilities of error in our own lesser and fallible selves.

The tragic plot is developed through complication to a catastrophe in which there occurs a sudden reversal in the hero’s fortune from happiness to disaster.

Shakespeare’s Othello is one of the few plays which accords entirely with Aristotle’s basic criteria for the tragic hero and plot.

**Important vocabulary**

**Anachronism**

Placing an event, person or thing out of its actual age.

Anything out of its historical place in time

**Soliloquy**

Lines spoken by a character to himself rather than to another character: a kind of “thinking out loud” for the purpose of revealing information about the character or the events which the reader or theater audience needs to know.

**Aside**

A stage device related to a soliloquy, in which a speaker expresses his thought or intention in a short speech, which by convention is audible to the audience, but is inaudible to the other characters on the stage.

**Dramatic Irony**

A theatrical device, consisting of the conscious production by the author of an ironical situation. The understanding of the unintentional play on words imports to the audience for a moment the role of an “omniscient god of the drama”.

**Catharsis**

outpouring of emotion, usually fear or pity, towards the main character of the play

in Greek it means “purgation” or “purification”

**Hamartia**

a tragic hero’s major flaw that brings about his downfall