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THE COMIC AND THE TRAGIC: CERTAIN ASPECTS OF MUTUAL RELATIONS

A. Brief Historical Outline

Throughout the history of European art and aesthetics, the comic has more often than not been contradistinguished from the tragic as comedy has been from tragedy. No doubt, this contraposition is partly justified since the comic and the tragic provoke quite opposite sensations. Those accompanying the perception of the tragic are, most generally speaking, of a grievous and grim nature (terror, awe, compassion, occasionally a feeling of inferiority in front of tragical heroes, etc.). Tears are oftentimes an outward expression of such sensations. On the other hand, the comic as a rule provokes gay and joyful feelings (satisfaction, a feeling of superiority, compensation for previous helplessness, brought on by the compromise of a loath opponent, satisfaction flowing from the confirmation of the superiority of long-adopted standards over some new-fangled ones which have been made fun of). Laughter and smile are an outward expression of these sensations.

It seems, however, that the different feelings aroused by the comic and the tragic do not explain and justify the absolute determination of the contraposition of these artistic values and the artistic genres linked to them, which had for long been the case in European artistic practice and theory and which was most conspicuously manifested by the classicist period in European art. It would seem that such an approach to the relationship between the comic and the tragic had been powerfully influenced by the character of ancient comedy and tragedy. Needless to say, the comedy is not the sole artistic genre playing up the comic but, on the other hand, there can be no doubt that the comic is in comedy the dominant aesthetic quality much the same as the tragic is in tragedy. The very terms "the comic" and "the tragic" clearly derive from the terms "comedy" and "tragedy". Consequently, the character of the ancient comedy and tragedy and the relationship existing between them in ancient Greece no doubt did exert considerable influence on subsequent artistic output and on the theoretical attempts to concretize the relation of the comic to the tragic.

In point of fact, the ancient comedy and tragedy were not only different but outright opposite genres. That opposition found manifestation in the different social origins and situations of the heroes of the tragedy and comedy, in the disparity of the languages in which they were written, in the distinct character of masks used by the comic and tragic actors, and even in the essential difference of the subject matter (the last trait, it appears, endured longest of them all). The *dramatis personae* of a tragedy were all great, eminent and wealthy; usually they were mythical heroes, royalty, or members of royal families. The *dramatis personae* of a comedy were as a rule plebeians or slaves. Representatives of the social elite appeared as comical characters solely when the playwright meant to discredit them. The language used in the tragedies was pompous, lofty and pathetic whereas the parlance employed in the comedies was of daily usage, bold and pithy, oftentimes even obscene. The same held for gestures, poses and manners of acting. Furthermore, that opposition found manifestation even in the extremely different masks worn by the tragic and comic actors, respectively.

The tragedies would broach the problems of life, death and revival, guilt and punishment, the fate of man and his relation to gods and to the established hierarchy of earthly values. These problems grew to assume formidable proportions and character, nearly metaphysical sometimes. Even sins, when committed by tragic heroes, were of a supreme calibre and deserved of a direct intervention of gods. On the other hand, the comedies, originally containing many orgiastic-phallic motifs, adopted as their object of interest the morals, and manners of family life and social life, social and political relations. In doing this, they never went beyond describing phenomena of daily life and never elevated them to the pedestal of grandeur. Sufferings experienced by tragic heroes evoked awe, sympathy and compassion; those experienced by comic heroes were of an entirely different calibre (more often than not, it was physical pain caused beating, material damages, mishaps and worries brought on by stupidity, overindulgence, ludicrous views held by the heroes, etc.), and as a rule they did not deserve of sympathy.

The antiquity created no single tragi-comedy and, as a matter of principle, was not familiar with the tragi-comic. That ancient tradition in drama ruled supreme for long ages. It was not broken by any important artistic *nouveauté* until the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries.

The breakthrough was effected by Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Shakespeare. In the plays of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega elements of the tragic co-exist and intermingle with elements of the comic. Elements of the tragi-comic can be found even in such plays as *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Richard III*. The play *Troilus and Cressida* certainly is a tragi-comedy akin to the grotesque tragi-comedies of the 20th century¹. More tragi-comedy can be discerned in Lope de Vega's (e. g. *La moza*

¹ Cf. the interesting remarks on the tragi-comic of *King Lear* and *Troilus and Cressida* by Jan Kott in his *Szkice o Szekspirze (Essays on Shakespeare)*, Warszawa 1962, pp. 78—86 and 100—141.

del cántaro) who, incidentally, demolished the tenets of ancient tragedy in a more determined fashion than Shakespeare. He not only managed to combine the tragic with the comic but also elevated plebeians to the status of tragic heroes (e. g. *Fuente Ovejuna*). By far the greatest success in breaking through the borderline between the tragic and the comic was however scored by Cervantes, the author of *Don Quijote* who became perhaps the most celebrated tragi-comic character in world art.

The latter half of the 17th century marked a triumph of classicism which again separated tragedy from comedy with an insurmountable wall. That period gave birth to the excellent "pure" tragedies of Corneille and Racine and equally "pure" comedies of Molière. Practically, only Alceste, the title hero of *Le Misanthrope*, has some discernible tragi-comic features.

The situation did change throughout the 18th century, even though tragi-comic motifs can be found in the artistic output of Carlo Gozzi (e. g. *Fiaba dell'amore delle tre melarancie*) and of Mozart (*Don Quijote*). It was not until the 19th century that a radical change occurred, manifested by the artistic production of Gogol, Musset, Goya, Słowacki, Chekhov, Daumier, Dostoevski, Zapolska, and others. Progressively greater affinity between the tragic and the comic has been observed in the 20th century, the theatre being the most outspoken medium of presenting such affinity. Pure tragedies have become a rarity. The problematics traditionally set aside for the tragedy (the sense of life, moral responsibility, guilt and punishment, and the like) is ever more frequently probed into in tragi-comedies and grotesque tragic comedies (Dürrenmatt, Ionesco, and others). Artistic theory has already many a time justified this practice. Even in 1929, the American art critic and theoretician J. Wood Krutch voiced in his work (*The Modern Temper*) a belief that modern man is too frail and little a creature, even in his own opinion, to live up to the requirements faced by a tragic hero. That is why, says Krutch, playwrights ceased writing good tragedies ever since the time of Shakespeare². This view is endorsed by other authors who cite in explanation the chaos and irrationality of our age and the absence of great and noble characters without which the tragedy is unthinkable³. Dürrenmatt, who subscribes to the theory that no pure tragedy can possibly be written in the 20th century, does not deny the existence of tragical situations, yet he holds that the tragic of our times can find adequate expression in comedy alone. "The tragedy", it is his view, "presupposes the existence of guilt, penance, punishment and responsibility, whereas today there are no guilty, no responsible", all in a sense are guilty⁴.

² Part of Krutch's *The Tragic Fallacy* is included in the anthology by Morris Weitz entitled *Problems in Aesthetics*, New York 1959, pp. 594—607.

³ Cf. W. Sypher, *The Meanings of Comedy*, included in the book *Comedy*, New York 1956, pp. 201 ff.

⁴ Quoted after "Dialog" 1958, No. 1.

The opinions cited above are very controversial in nature. The fact that in the 20th century no tragedy can possibly be created after the pattern of the ancient tragedies is by no means proof of the impossibility of creating a tragedy in general. Many works of art testify against such a thesis, to wit Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, J. Andrzejewski's *Ashes and the Diamond*, A. Tarkowski's *Child of War*, Kalatozov's *Cranes Are Flying*, and others which are indubitable tragedies. The allegation that there is a want of truly great and noble characters in our times is groundless. The aspect of guilt and punishment is not at all an indispensable component of every tragedy. Certainly children bear no responsibility for the fate of the world and, after all, among the adults too the degree of responsibility is not equally distributed. Thus it is wrong to deny the possibility of creating a 20th century tragedy. Nevertheless, it is true that in our time tragi-comedies are more common than tragedies. The 20th century finally abolished the absolute barriers, so characteristic of the classicist period, separating the comic from the tragic. That was an artificial barrier with no justification in real life.

How apposite are the remarks of Heinrich Heine in his *Reisebilder*, concerning the intermingling of the tragic with the comic in human life:

"In point of fact, human life is so deadly serious that it would be unbearable were it not to combine pathos with the comic. Poets are aware of this. The most horrible images of human madness are shown by Aristophanes only in the laughing mirror of wit; Goethe does not undertake to express the convulsive pain of a sage who understands his own nothingness but through the verse of a puppet theatre; Shakespeare puts the mortal lament of the wretchedness of the world into the mouth of a clown, timidly tinkling the bells on his cap.

They all followed into the footprints of the supreme Poet who has attained the zenith of humour in his thousand-act tragedy of the world, as we are witnessing daily: heroes give way to clowns and jugglers with rods and rattles, after the bloody scenes of the Revolution and the Empire the arena is re-entered by the obese Bourbons relishing their old jokes and delicately legitimistic *bon-mots* [...]. It happens that comical traits may penetrate even the superb pathos of the tragedy of the world; a desperate Republican, who like Brutus sank a knife in his heart, may have sniffed at it suspiciously before that to find out whether it had not been used to cut herring: identical scenes happen in the vast stage of the world as on our beggarly little stages: on both there occur drunken heroes, kings who forget their parts, flaccid wings, the dominating voices of prompters, and ballerinas for whom the poesy of their loins wins admirable successes"⁵.

These same events, these same characters or personal traits, depending on the point of view or manner of presentation, may be seen and understood as comic, tragi-comic, or tragic. For instance, parsimony as the dominating trait in a person's

⁵ H. Heine, *Dziela wybrane (Selected Works)*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1956, p. 170. The quotation is translated by Jerzy Jastrzębowski.

character was on various occasions represented in world drama as something comic (Molière's Harpagon or Mr. Łatka in Aleksander Fredro's *Widow's Dower*) and tragic (Shylock from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* or the baron from Pushkin's *Miserly Knight*). The same holds for jealousy and those who indulge in it. Grzegorz Dyndała is only comical, Alcest is a tragi-comic figure, whereas Othello undoubtedly is a tragic hero. Similarly, identical situations and plots may provide the starting point for both tragedy and comedy. For instance, lies and cheating are a point of departure in a comedy like *Le Mariage de Figaro*, a tragi-comedy like Zapolska's *Żabusia*, and a tragedy like *Othello*. The same holds for adultery, misunderstanding, etc. The same can be said about the many historical or legendary figures who on various occasions were presented either in a comic or tragic light while the basic plot was left unchanged. Suffice it to point to Doctor Faustus, the principal hero of many tragedies, who also was represented many a time as a comic character⁶ (e. g. 17th century folk spectacles in Germany, the unfinished comedy by Paul Valéry Lust *La Demoiselle de Cristal*, or René Claire's film *La beauté du diable*). The figure of Don Quijote does not differ in this respect. The juxtaposition and combination of the comic and the tragic occurs in various forms and discharges different functions in different literary genres or even in different artistic works within one genre.

Depending on the character of the work in which the comic combines with the tragic, we can distinguish four basic fashions in which those aesthetic qualities appear together:

1. Concurrent appearance of the tragic and the tragi-comism in works which are basically comic.
2. Concurrent appearance of the comic and the tragi-comic in works which are basically tragic.
3. Intermingling of the comic with the tragic in tragi-comic and comic-tragic works for which the inseparable bond of these aesthetic qualities becomes a constitutional determinant of their genre.
4. Combination of the tragic with the comic in works which in their entirety must be considered as neither comic nor tragic.

B. The Tragic and the Tragi-comic in Satire

Certain theoreticians of the satire are inclined to see the essence of satire in its inseparable bond of the comic with the tragic. Jewnina, for instance, is an exemplary proponent of the very close relationship between the satire and the tragic. From her point of view, the satire "is an objective unity of these two opposed notions: the comic and the tragic. It assumes a comical form because it makes use of comi-

⁶ On the various artistic personifications of Faustus cf. G. Sinko, *Doktora Fausta podróż przez wieki* (*Doctor Faustus' Travels through Centuries*), "Dialog" 1963, No. 3, pp. 104–116.

cal effects [...], its contents however are tragical for they present the terrible, hideous, and unbreakable contradictions and conflicts developed by a human society" ⁷.

True, the satire employs such means of expression in which the comic is relatively often bound and intermingled with the tragic. It seems, however, that we must not portray this bond as absolute and unbreakable. The tragic is not at all an inseparable property of the satire. Even though elements of the tragic do appear in certain satirical productions, we must not conceive the tragic as the principal contents of the satire.

What Jewnina really does is confine the notion of satire to one of its forms, which is an impermissible precedent even from the point of view of the authoress herself who on some other occasion speaks about two forms of satire: the "grim and hopeless" satire (as exemplified by Swift), and the "gay and joyful" satire (represented by Rabelais) ⁸.

The tragic and the tragi-comic appearing in satirical works most frequently concern the situation or fate of the victims of individuals, vices, social relations and views, vigorously combated by the satirist. The very comical conversations between Chichikov and the land-owners concerned with the purchase of dead souls, and the ridiculous situations accompanying these conversations, all have an underlying tragic meaning. That underlying meaning is the tragic lot of the Russian serfs treated as though they were inanimate objects. Similar tragic undercurrents in works displaying ostensibly none but satirical figures can be discerned in the artistic output of such authors as Swift, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Goya, Daumier, Sukhov-Kobylin, and others. On other occasions, the victims of satirical figures are presented with the express intention of the author to make compassion inflame still more the feelings of anger and indignation at the phenomena combated by him.

Examples of this kind are to be found in Zapolska's (the tragical situation of Hanka in the play *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*, or the tragi-comical characters of Rak in *Żabusia* and the husband in *The Foursome*). Elements of the tragi-comic (usually personified by Charlie or his counterpart), co-existing with phenomena ridiculed by means of satire, are found in some of Chaplin's films (e. g. *A Dog's Life*, *Modern Times*, *The Great Dictator*). Similarly, the tragic and the tragi-comic are interwoven into satirical works by Chekhov, Goya, Maupassant, Zola, Thackeray, and others. It is relatively infrequently that the tragi-comic characteristics are impressed on figures whom the satirist means to compromise. One example is provided by Poprishchin, the hero of Gogol's *Memoirs of a Madman*, or the title hero of Heinrich Mann's satirical novel *Professor Unrat*.

⁷ F. Jewnina, *Rabelais*, Warszawa 1951, p. 282. The quotation has been translated by Jerzy Jastrzębowski.

⁸ Cf. Jewnina, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

The tragic and the tragi-comic appearing in satirical works may discharge one of the following functions:

a) In cases when the tragic characterizes the fate of victims of the objects of satire, it as a rule strengthens the negative attitude of the receiving end toward the phenomena attacked by the satirist, increasing the feelings of anger and indignation.

b) In cases when the elements of the tragic or the tragi-comic characterize a figure ridiculed by the satirist, they make the public's attitude toward that figure more complex and allay the acuteness of satirical negation. Tragico-satirical characters can but rarely evoke indignation and anger. Most frequently, they are apt to evoke contempt and sometimes even disgust, neither of which however is combined with compassion.

c) Finally, the tragic or the tragi-comic may appear in satirical works and not be directed point blank at either the object of satire or her victims. In such cases, they are usually employed for the purpose of presenting and characterizing more fully the reality.

C. The Tragic and the Tragi-comic in the Humourist Works

The tragic in humourist works is present more often than not as an underlying meaning hidden behind the plausibly serene contents. This is a typical feature of certain of Gogol's and Chekhov's works which initially appear to be nothing but a colourful and humorous anecdote, yet upon completion of reading they arouse, quite surprisingly sometimes, somber reflections and a downcast mood.

The tragi-comic makes a much more frequent appearance in humoresques. Chaplin, perhaps the greatest humourist of the 20th century, in his mature period as a rule made Charlie into a tragi-comic figure (cf. *City Lights* or *The Gold Rush*). Very akin to Charlie is Ilya Erenburg's Leizorek Roitshvanets. Many elements of the tragic-comic are also to be found in the humorous writings of Bolesław Prus and Kornel Makuszyński. Presentation of a combination of the comic with the tragic in humorous works is a result of the authors' realistic and relativistic attitude to life. Therefore, in humoresque writings to a greater extent than in the satire the occurrence of tragic elements depends on the author's intention to present an ample, all-round and objective picture of reality. The combination of the comic with the tragic goes a long way toward enriching the receptor's artistic sensations and inducing him to philosophical reflections on human life. A wise dosage of comical sensations will be necessary for any surfeit of the comic understandably is to be avoided.

Needless to say, the "pure and straightforward" type of the comic and the crystal-pure type of the tragic mutually exclude each other. Consequently, the tragic or even the tragi-comic are unthinkable in the farces and vaudeville shows unless they are a hybrid of the farcical-vaudeville type of the comic and the complex type of the comic (e. g. humourist or satirical).

D. The Comic in Tragic Works

The comic introduced into tragic works may discharge various functions therein:

- a) alleviate the tragic of events depicted,
- b) bring out by way of contrast the tragic contents,
- c) diversify the plot and introduce momentary relaxation.

At times, it may be the humourist type of the comic as in the case of grave-diggers in *Hamlet*, the young anarchist sailor in Vsevolod Vishnevsky's *The Optimistic Tragedy*, or the vodka-drinking scene in Bondarchuk's film *The Fate of Man*.

At other times, it is the satirical type of the comic. It is represented in tragic works by characters like old Karamazov, Ślaz in Śłowacki's *Lilla Weneda*, and the Voivod's Secretary and Journalist in Andrzejewski's *Ashes and the Diamond*. Elements of satirical comism can likewise be found in certain expressly tragic works of Goya and in such stories of Chekhov as *Country Wenches*, *Ivy*, and *Ward No. 6*. The comism relating to principal heroes from the point of view the basic tragic plot is as a rule manifested in the form of tragi-comism (Richard III, King Lear and Gloucester, Taras Bulba, and others). Obviously, this is not mean that the tragi-comic may not characterize some second-rate figures in tragic works, as evidenced by the characters of Clown Nik in Śłowacki's *Maria Stuart* and Marmeladov in Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment*.

The distinctions herein performed naturally are rather schematic and relative. In practice, many literary works take a position intermediate between humoresque and satire, or between comedy and tragi-comedy. Don Quijote, for instance, is without a shade of doubt a tragi-comical character, but a strong argument could be put up both for and against classifying the Cervantes *opus magnum* as a comic work, or as a tragi-comic one. Opinions will likewise differ on exactly which type of the comic prevails in that book.

E. Intermingling of the Comic with the Tragic

Combination and intermingling of the comic with the tragic in the tragi-comic and comico-tragic works is a dominating aspect determining the general mood and meaning of the work in question. Of course, there exist various ways in which to impress the tragi-comic character on a literary work. The simplest by far is the constant interposition of comical characters, situations and plots, with tragic ones (an illustration of this being Musset's *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* and the film of Commerini *Go Home*). More complex is the method of simultaneously bringing to light and emphasizing the comical and tragical aspects of the same events, situations, and characters. This is a method employed typically by Gogol (*The Cloak* and *Memoirs of a Madman*) and Chekhov (*The Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*). On the same premises bases the tragi-comic of the second part of Andrzej Munk's *Eroica* and Dino Risi's Italian film tragi-comedy *Life Is Difficult*. Two other Italian film tragi-comedies (Monicelli's *The Great War* and Rossellini's *Ge-*

neral della Rovere) achieve the general tragi-comical significance by depicting their heroes initially as comical characters though entangled in tragi-comical episodes of a generally tragic situation in which they subsequently mature to live up to their final tragic greatness. And finally, tragic contents and problems may also be conveyed in a grotesque-comical manner, as illustrated by the tragi-comic of such contemporary plays like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*, *Romulus the Great*, and *Physicists*, and Ionesco's *Les Chaises* — granting all the deep-running differences between the dramatic output of these three playwrights.

The presence of a tragi-comical character in a literary work does not automatically predetermine the tragi-comic character of the whole work. It is only the tragi-comical fate or character of the principal heroes of the work that can impress on it the same aesthetic significance and colour. It is not to mean, however, that the principal hero every tragi-comedy is a tragi-comical character. Neither the heroines of *The Three Sisters* nor the heroes of *The Great War* are tragi-comical characters. Only he whose tragic quality is, at least partially, determined by his comic quality is a genuinely tragi-comical character. His tragic quality must consist above all in the ridiculous character of his personality and appearance, situation in life and prospects of development, attitudes toward life and other people, and the ridiculous ways in which he attempts to materialize his ideals and dreams. How apposite in this context seems the remark by the Bulgarian aesthetician I. Pasi⁹ that if Don Quijote was deprived of his comical features his tragism would *eo ipso* be destroyed. Apart from Don Quijote, other literary characters fit that condition, too: Akaki Akakievitch Bashmachkin, Charlie from Chaplin's mature films, Dürrenmatt's *Romulus the Great*, and fabulous Silvio Magnozzi, exquisitely played by Alberto Sordi, one of Italy's finest tragi-comedians of the present day, in Dino Risi's film *Life Is Difficult*. Were we to eliminate all that is ridiculous from the fates and characters of these heroes we would thereby greatly impair their tragic quality.

Naturally, the comic and the tragic can co-exist and combine with each other also in such works of art which are neither comic nor tragi-comic. This form of relations between the comic and the tragic is, however, the least interesting in the context of problems discussed in the present article, and therefore will not be dealt with at length. The various manifestations of the relations between the comic and the tragic in works of this type are usually nothing more but one of the many specific literary colours employed by the artist in the act of creation.

Translated by Jerzy Jastrzębowski

⁹ I. Pasi, *Tragichnoto*, Sofia 1963, p. 71.

KOMIZM I TRAGIZM. PEWNE ASPEKTY ICH WZAJEMNYCH POWIĄZAŃ

STRESZCZENIE

W historii sztuki i estetyki europejskiej relacja między komizmem a tragizmem ulegała przeobrażeniom.

Oddzielanie i przeciwstawianie komizmu i tragizmu typowe dla sztuki antycznej zaczęto przezwyciężać już w okresie Odrodzenia (Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Szekspir). Klasycyzm, który zatrzymał w 2 połowie XVIII w., zahamował tę ewolucję, oddzielając komedię od tragedii nieprzekraczalnym murem. Dopiero wiek XIX — dzięki twórczości Gogola, Musseta, Goi, Słowackiego, Czechowa, Daumiera, Dostojewskiego i innych — przynosi radykalny przełom w tej dziedzinie. W XX w. można zaobserwować dalsze zbliżenie tragizmu i komizmu, które najbardziej zdecydowane formy przybiera w teatrze. Czyste tragedie stają się rzadkością. Wątki tragiczne coraz częściej podejmowane są przez tragikomedie i groteskowe komedie tragiczne. Niektórzy krytycy i teoretycy uważają, że w XX w. tragedia jest niemożliwa. Pogląd ten nie wydaje się jednak dostatecznie uzasadniony. Tragedia w sztuce XX w. jest po prostu inna niż tragedia antyczna, nie jest to nic wyjątkowego, bo ewolucję przeżywają wszystkie gatunki artystyczne i wszystkie formy sztuki. To samo można powiedzieć o tragizmie.

Próby oddzielenia komizmu od tragizmu chińskim murem były zabiegami sztucznymi, nie znajdującymi żadnego uzasadnienia w życiu ludzkim, w którym komizm i tragizm spletają się nierozzerwalnie.

W odmiennych gatunkach sztuki, a nawet w różnych utworach artystycznych zestawienie i łączenie się komizmu z tragizmem występuje w różnych formach i spełnia różne funkcje estetyczne.

W pracy rozpatrywane są cztery zasadnicze formy powiązań komizmu z tragizmem (wyróżnione ze względu na charakter utworu, w którym występują): 1. tragizm i tragikomizm w satyrze, 2. komizm i tragikomizm w humorystyce, 3. komizm i tragikomizm w utworach tragicznych (omówione są przy tym różne funkcje estetyczne, jakie tragizm i tragikomizm spełniają w utworach satyrycznych i humorystycznych, oraz komizm i tragikomizm w utworach tragicznych), 4. spleatanie się komizmu z tragizmem w utworach tragikomicznych i komiczno-tragicznych, dla których nierozzerwalne powiązanie tych jakości estetycznych staje się konstytutywną cechą gatunkową. W utworach tego typu łączenie się i przeplatanie się komizmu z tragizmem jest momentem dominującym, który determinuje ogólny nastrój, wymowę i specyfikę utworu. W związku z tym przeanalizowane są różne metody nadawania charakteru tragikomicznego całemu dziełu sztuki.

Tylko tragikomiczny los lub charakter głównych bohaterów dzieła może nadać mu tę samą wymowę i zabarwienie estetyczne, tragikomizm postaci drugorzędnych nie staje się dominującym tonem utworu. Prawdziwie tragikomiczną postacią zaś jest taki bohater, którego tragiczność zdeterminowana jest przez jego komiczność, którego tragiczność polega przede wszystkim na śmieszności jego osobowości lub wyglądu zewnętrznego, położenia i perspektyw, postawy wobec życia i ludzi oraz prób realizacji swych ideałów i marzeń.

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