Eng 105
Havenick
Dramatic Types: “What Kind of Play It Is”

I. ON THE SERIOUS SIDE/THE SERIOUS TREATMENT OF SUBJECT

A) Tragedy (literally “song of the goat” tragos = goat/ aedin = to sing)
   “Dramatizes the triumph of human dignity and spirit in the face of death
   and despair/ Not just a “sad play with an unhappy ending”

   “Tragedy is not saddening and depressing in the ordinary sense of a fatal accident or
   some destructive human or natural catastrophe. Tragedy is positive and optimistic in its
   view of the heights the human being can reach.”
   - an assertion of humanity’s fundamental greatness
   - demonstrates individual’s ability to rise to heights of human dignity
   - tragic hero must face antagonistic force
   - “There is a certain kinship in the great sacrifice; humanity has sacrificed something it
     can ill afford to lose.”
   - irony is key to understanding theme
   - violence is reported but not acted out on stage
   - conflict must end in death or exile for the protagonist (“Only in death does the tragic
     grandeur emerge.”)

   What is the point of tragedy: protagonist, faced with antagonistic force can rise to the
   occasion and assert magnificence as a human being, defying antagonistic forces.

   Protagonist is doomed from start: there is no possibility of escape: but what the
   protagonist has done in the process of struggle is what counts. He/She rises in courage
   and defiance demonstrating godlike qualities that lie within humankind.

   Catharsis: in viewing a tragedy one experiences compassionate pity (not sentimental, not
   pitiful) as well as “terror” at the magnitude of forces. The drama ends in tranquility; the
   audience has gone through their own cleansing, spiritual purgation, in realizing how great
   a human can be.

   Qualities of the Tragic Hero/Protagonist
   - of noble stature
   - possesses traits of human greatness/stature far beyond ordinary
   - inwardly bears a Tragic Flaw
   - undergoes reversal of fortune
   - recognizes the truth of the drama, the truth of his/her life

B. Melodrama: (literally “a play with music” melo = music)
Originated in the 18th century when theaters offered background and incidental music. Subject matter was full of blood and thunder and lots of exciting action. “Melodrama anticipates that things will all work out in the end, thus creating hope.”

C. **Straight Drama** a product of literary realism. Avoids emphasis of tragedy (characters) and melodrama (plot) and focuses on common people in ordinary existence.

II. **COMEDY**: a lighter form of drama

Aristotle once said that tragedy shows people as greater than they are and comedy shows people as less than they are.

- detached point of view/comedy forces us to keep our distance
- lulls us into realizing that the pain is not damaging, the disaster not permanent
- because the point-of-view distances, we don’t get emotionally involved

A) **High Comedy**: intellectual in appeal, static, given to words, well rounded characters
   - social comedy
   - comedy of manners
   - drawing room comedy

B) **Straight Comedy**: middle genre, avoids intellectual appeal/wit of high drama, also avoids vulgarities of farce, deals with average, plodding, ordinary folks

C) **Farce**: anti intellectual appeal, similar to melodrama, result is meant for fun and laughter