Aristotle’s Rules for Tragedy
from *The Poetics*
Definition

Tragedy =
A drama in which the protagonist dies or is utterly defeated.
The “Musts”

1. The protagonist (main character) must be a person of importance
   - Hamlet (a prince)
   - Oedipus (a king)
   - Brutus (from *Julius Caesar*) (a senator)
2. The protagonist is guilty of a *hamartia* (literally a “missing the mark”; a flaw)

– jealousy
– pride
– greed
The “Musts”

3. The audience must empathize with the protagonist

– This process is necessary for the audience to experience *catharsis*
– (the purging or cleansing of emotions)
The “Musts”

4. The tragedy must have a single plot.
The “Optionals”

1. *Peripeteia* = an ironic twist
2. Anagnorisis = a discovery or revelation

Oh, I get it now!
The “Optionals”

3. Fate or inevitability
The “Optionals”

4. Tragic joy

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\text{Happy face}} & = \text{\text{Sad face}} \\
\text{？}
\end{align*}
\]
Summary: The Elements of Tragedies

- **Musts**
  - person of importance
  - *hamartia*
  - audience empathy
  - one plot

- **Optionals**
  - *peripeteia*
  - *anagnorisis*
  - fate
  - tragic joy