



Universidad de Valladolid

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

Is Arcane a Modern Greek Tragedy?

Alba Fernández Soto

Tutora: María Anunciación Carrera de la Red

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

Curso: 2023-2024

ABSTRACT

Aristotle wrote a definition of Greek tragedy that has been applied to the analysis of literary works as many times as it has been revised. The structural elements he identified in the construction of plot, just like that of character, are still part of today's actualizations of the concept. The objective of this dissertation is to carry out a deep introspection of the Netflix series *Arcane* (2021) with the help of the original definition, by reviewing its plot and its construction of characters. The question of whether *Arcane* could be considered a modern Greek tragedy, as has been suggested, will be resolved, concluding that while the series does obviously deviate from the theatre of ancient Greece in conception and execution, there is a solid basis to affirm that *Arcane* exhibits some of the key structural elements of plot and characterization defined by Aristotle.

Keywords: Aristotle, Greek tragedy, *Arcane*, Poetics, Plot, Character.

RESUMEN

Aristóteles escribió una definición de la tragedia griega que desde entonces ha sido aplicada al análisis de obras literarias tantas veces como ha sido revisada. Los elementos estructurales que identificó en la construcción de la trama, al igual que en la de personaje, aún son parte de las recientes actualizaciones del concepto. El objetivo de esta disertación es llevar a cabo una introspección profunda de la serie de Netflix *Arcane* (2021) con ayuda de la definición original, a base de evaluar su trama y su construcción de personajes. La pregunta sobre si *Arcane* podría ser considerada una tragedia griega moderna, como ha sido sugerida, será resuelta, concluyendo con que mientras que la serie si se desvía de maneras obvias del teatro de la antigua Grecia en concepción y en ejecución, hay una base sólida para afirmar que *Arcane* sí exhibe algunos de los elementos estructurales clave de trama y caracterización definidos por Aristóteles.

Palabras clave: Aristóteles, tragedia griega, *Arcane*, Poética, Trama, Personaje.

Table of contents

Introduction.....	6
1. An introduction to <i>Arcane</i>	8
1.1. Main characters.....	8
1.2. Plot.....	10
2. The Aristotelian tragedy and its elements.....	11
2.1. Aristotle’s definition of tragedy.....	11
2.1.1. Tragedy and comedy.....	11
2.1.2. Tragedy, comedy, and epic poetry.....	12
2.2. The importance of plot and character.....	13
2.3. Other subsidiary elements.....	14
2.4. Structure: metabasis, peripetia, anagnorisis and catharsis.....	14
2.5. The tragic hero and hamartia.....	15
3. The tragedy of <i>Arcane</i>	16
3.1. The Absence of unity of time and thought.....	17
3.2. Action and plot.....	18
3.3. Metabasis, peripetia, and anagnorisis in Jinx’s story.....	21
3.4. Jinx and Vi as tragic heroines.....	26
Conclusion.....	29
Works cited.....	31

Introduction

The objective of this dissertation is to use the field of literary theory to carry out an examination of a series I have been interested in for some time now. The series is *Arcane* (2021), which is an original animated show on the streaming platform of Netflix, based on the universe of the videogame *League of Legends*. This analysis seeks to answer one specific question: Is *Arcane* a modern Greek tragedy?

Due to the nature of this query, the point of reference used for the discussion is Aristotle's *Poetics*. This work is a guide which includes a definition of what a tragedy is, a list of elements it should contain from most to least important, the construction of plot with *metabasis*, *peripetia*, *anagnorisis* and *catharsis*, and the characteristics of a tragic Greek hero.

I had engaged in a similar although much briefer analysis of this same topic two years ago in class, when *Arcane* was still recent and we had started learning about Aristotle's influence in literary theory. It was then that the idea of the series possibly being a good example of a modern Greek tragedy came to mind. It is important to note, though, that this first analysis I made was not the most precise, and it was centered on only certain aspects of the Aristotelian tragedy, which made the answer I arrived at not the most trustworthy. However, years later, I felt like I had more to say on the matter, and this topic still intrigued me, which is why I decided to go with it for this dissertation. Furthermore, I discovered I was not the only one who considered this possibility when I found a video-essay on YouTube arguing in favor of *Arcane*'s nature as a perfect modern Greek tragedy, and although I did not agree with every single affirmation made in it, it proved the validity of having this discussion and gave me a different perspective to revise my points with.

Methodology

To carry out this analysis, looking at it through the lens of intermediality is required. Because the main point of reference is *Poetics* (a work written when the only form of media it guided was theatre) it is understandable that *Arcane* is going to be quite different in presentation, due to the huge disparity in their media formats and time period.

As a consequence of this, certain elements that Aristotle mentions in his *Poetics* will have to be left behind for this examination, since the way they are presented in its

originally intended form of media is one too incompatible to reconcile with *Arcane*'s. An example of this are the elements of song and music, which take on a much different display in a stage play from ancient Greece than they do in a contemporary Netflix production.

Moreover, certain social conventions that were present in old Greece are no longer prevalent in our modern times. Misogyny and gender roles, for example, seem to be completely out of the picture in *Arcane*'s universe: women are allowed to be in positions of power just as much as men are, and there does not seem to be any social pressures or rules to act a certain way forced upon either gender, which stands far from Aristotle's patriarchal reality.

In spite of this, the aspects indicated in *Poetics* to be the most important in the construction of a tragedy – those being the characteristics of a Greek tragic hero, and the structural elements of the plot – did not present much of an issue with this intermedial transposition.

The above-mentioned video-essay is called “Arcane is a Modern Greek Tragedy”, and it was posted by the user *honorablefrogger* in the free platform of YouTube. This video affirms the statement it makes in its title, concluding at the end that the series does in fact fit into this mold. Throughout the twenty-two minutes rundown of this video, *honorablefrogger* makes various points to support their statement: they first introduce the watchers to the concept of a Greek tragedy, then they go over concepts such as hamartia and the reversal of fortune, the characteristics of a classic tragic Greek hero, and how these present themselves in the show. They state the fatal flaws of the main characters, with Jinx's being her insecurity, and Vi's being her pride and tendency to act violent. Furthermore, they declare the aftermath of the tragic incident in episode three to be both sisters' reversal of fortune and realization. *Honorablefrogger* finishes by mentioning how almost every character in *Arcane* could fit the role of a tragic hero, with Jinx being the best example of the psychological darkness expected from the protagonist of a Greek tragedy.

To check whether this video was accurate in its assessments or not, it was necessary to carefully examine *Poetics* first. This allowed me to understand and extract the points of reference for an Aristotelian tragedy that would be later applied to *Arcane*. Other sources consulted for the elaboration of this dissertation were multiple articles and book

chapters written by scholars on their interpretation of the Greek philosopher's words. They have helped illuminate many of the aspects discussed.

Hypothesis

The final hypothesis reached in this dissertation is that *Arcane* is not a modern Greek tragedy, if we take this fully in the Aristotelian sense, due to the fact that it misses the mark in certain aspects, such as those of thought and time. However, there is certainly a basis for the idea this inquiry raises, as the series does develop and structure its plot in the Aristotelian fashion, along with the main characters lining up almost perfectly with the traits associated to a classic tragic hero.

1. An introduction to *Arcane*

Arcane (2021) is a Netflix original adult animated series that is based on the highly popular online game *League of Legends*, developed by Riot Games and launched to the public in 2009. This series expands upon the story of the game and does so by utilizing some of its many playable characters. In relation to the story of *League of Legends*, *Arcane* is set chronologically before the time framework of the game, therefore showing the backstories of these characters, and establishing the development of the world they live in. Furthermore, *Arcane* works as well as a standalone show, as it is not necessary to have previously played the game or be knowledgeable on its story and characters to understand what happens. At the point of this writing, this series consists of one season with nine episodes of around forty minutes each; although a second season is in the works and expected to be released by the end of 2024.

1.1. Main characters

The story, which is dystopic and does not have a localization of space and time, is primarily centered around the characters of Vi (Violet) and Jinx, formerly known as Powder, two sisters who lost their parents at a very young age and come from a very rough life in the poor and marginalized city of Zaun. Initially, they are presented as opposites, with Vi being the older, bolder, and stronger sister of the two, while Powder is younger, more insecure, and weak-minded, although both, and especially the latter, experiment changes along with their world. Their relationship also fundamentally changes, as their once very sweet bond turns sour.

Other characters from Zaun were present at some point during their childhood and helped with these developments. Principal among them were Vander, a man who decided to take care of them as his daughters when he found them, after having lost their parents in a war he partook in. He also had a brother figure now-turned-enemy of his own, the ambitious Silco, whom he had fought in the past over a moral disagreement and takes the role of the villain throughout the season. Two main allies help Silco with his big plans of gaining liberation for Zaun: Sevika, his loyal fighter and protector, who had previously allied with Vander, and Singed, a skilled scientist. Mylo, Claggor, and Ekko were other children the sisters grew up very close with, and Vander, for his part, had a friend who did not go rogue, Benzo, who helps him out and is implied to be raising Ekko.

On the other hand, and in contrast to the sisters' home, there is Piltover, a city that is both literally and metaphorically situated above Zaun, in which the upper classes and the council which makes political decisions for both cities are situated. It comes with a secondary plot, in which it is seen how the city develops, and of course, how that development affects Zaun and the sisters. The most important characters from the upper city are Jayce Talis, a young dreamer fascinated by arcane powers who wants to learn to control them to make a better world, and Viktor, his physically disabled but brilliant business partner and close friend who was born in Zaun. Mel Medarda is a charming and cunning councilwoman, who helps Jayce with his mission and with whom he eventually falls in love, and Heimerdinger is a wise non-human councilman who acts as his mentor.

An important subsection of characters from Piltover that play a great role in Vi and Jinx's storyline are the Enforcers. These are the police force in both cities, and, just like Piltover as whole, are shown to be fundamentally rotten, as they often abuse their power against Zaunites. One of them is Marcus, a man who, despite having some softness in his heart and caring deeply for his very young daughter, is still quite unlikeable, as he has a short temper and makes deals with Silco in secret. Other Enforcers are more sympathetic, such as Grayson, the original calm and collected Sheriff who loses her life during the first act, and her role is left to be taken over by Marcus. Most important is Caitlyn, the daughter of councilwoman Cassandra Kiranman and longtime friend of Jayce, who just like him, is idealistic and has hopes of making the world a better place. She eventually meets and works with Vi, and as the two start to fall for each other, she acquires a new perspective that as a sheltered rich young lady of the upper city she never had before.

Also relevant are Sky, Viktor's shy assistant, whose affection for him led her to a tragic ending, and Ambessa Medarda, Mel's mother from an outsider city who exiled her daughter.

1.2. Plot

The plot of *Arcane* is centered on world and character building. There is not one specific goal or objective in the story, but instead, it is the circumstances and the decisions of the characters that drive the story forward.

The first episode introduces the main characters, Vi and Powder, as they go on a doomed mission with Mylo and Claggor to loot (unknowingly) Jayce's apartment. This establishes the central force at the core of the series: arcane magic, presented in the form of small but destructive blue gemstones. The second episode concentrates more on the other side of the coin, providing a deeper insight into Jayce, Viktor and the Piltover council. The third episode marks the end of the first act as the Zaun children are forced to face the consequences of their failed mission, and Silco makes his first move. This episode is one of the most important in the series, as it establishes the most tragic and life-altering moment in Vi and Powder's life, while simultaneously establishing the stakes and risks of these arcane powers that Jayce is so eager in utilizing for the greater good.

In the fourth episode, *Arcane* then proceeds to shock the audience with a jump in time, in which, after more than half a decade, both the characters and world have grown significantly. Vi is now imprisoned, Powder, now calling herself Jinx, has become an antagonistic figure, and the plot is focused on showing the ongoing conflict between Zaun and Piltover, as Silco has become a drug lord and taken over the undercity, with big plans for its independence. All the while Jayce struggles to manage his newfound political power. The fifth episode follows this up by having Caitlyn partner up with Vi, as she searches for a way to take Silco down. Episode six has the awaited reunion of the sisters, as they had parted ways those many years ago, and episode seven has the two, although separately, meet Ekko again. Jinx's reunion with the boy is not so friendly, though, as they both almost lose their lives in a fight, and Jinx is only saved by Singed giving her a strong dose of the powerful drug Silco had been trafficking with in Zaun.

The season culminates in episode nine, when Silco has a talk with Jayce in which he is granted the opportunity to obtain his much-desired nation of Zaun. Meanwhile, Jinx's identity crisis and abandonment issues drive her into forcibly reuniting Vi, Silco and

Caitlyn in the same room, to try and figure out if she could go back to being Powder, or if she really is Jinx. This results in tragedy, and just as Jayce, Viktor and Mel are convincing the Piltover council to vote in favor of Zaun's independence to prevent a war between the two cities, Jinx launches a missile directly to their location. The season thus ends in a cliffhanger.

2. The Aristotelian tragedy and its elements

The first thing that ought to be done is to understand what exactly an Aristotelian tragedy is. Aristotle's *Poetics* must be the first and main point of reference, since that is where all of the Greek philosopher's thoughts on the matter are expressed. Although these have been modified by a multitude of interpreters in later revisions of the book, it will nevertheless be possible to extract an accurate definition that is clear enough to comprehend.

2.1. Aristotle's definition of tragedy

Aristotle states his definition of a Greek tragedy by clarifying that it needs to be both serious in nature (as in, its events get treated with severity), and complete (these events are not dropped off and reach a concrete ending):

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative. (*Poetics* VI, 22)

By "an embellished language", Aristotle refers to how song and rhythm ought to be incorporated into the speech so they can "decorate" it. These ornamental sounds, although not strictly necessary, give beauty to the speech and make the dialogue they are accompanying more impactful for the viewers.

At last, the philosopher states that tragedy should be carried by performance and not by narration. A tragedy should depend on its plot and the events that are performed in it first and foremost, instead of being overtly reliant on an external narration.

2.1.1. Tragedy and comedy

One of the assessments Aristotle first makes in *Poetics* to define the concept of a tragedy is to compare it to epic poetry and comedy. The three are forms of imitation of real life, but “[t]hey differ, however, from one another in 3 three respects,—the means, the objects, the manner of imitation being in each case distinct” (*Poetics* I, 6). Despite comedy and epic poetry coinciding with tragedy in their core objective of representing reality, they go through with it in fundamentally different ways, and make use of distinctive methods to do so.

Moreover, when comparing tragedy to comedy, Aristotle states the main difference between the two to be that “[c]omedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life” (*Poetics* II, 10). This exposes the different nature of the two genres of Greek writing: Whereas comedy’s imitation of life aims to parody the human experience, and thus toy with the worst aspects of it in hopes of obtaining a laugh from the audience, tragedy is centered in utilizing the vulnerable and sympathetic values of humankind to make the spectators connect on a deeper level with the story and characters.

He then draws on further similarities. Both gained more prestige than previous forms of poetry, as he states, “[The Greek] composed Comedies in place of lampoons, and Tragedies in place of Epic poems, the newer forms of poetry being higher and more highly esteemed than the old” (*Poetics* IV, 16). Tragedy and comedy originated in the same unintentional fashion, “Tragedy—as also Comedy—was at first mere improvisation” (*Poetics* IV, 16). According to Scott Scullion in “Tragedy and Religion: The Problem of Origins” (2005), this similarity, however, seems to be more of an assumption on the Greek philosopher’s part than anything set in stone, as the history of comedy is currently a lost one, and had been at the time Aristotle wrote *Poetics* (24).

2.1.2. Tragedy, comedy, and epic poetry

The same passage is used by Aristotle to further explain the concept of tragedy in relation to epic poetry, “Epic poetry agrees with Tragedy in so as far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher type” (*Poetics* VI, 20), he adds. That is to say, that tragedy, just like epic poetry, is centered on characters of a high social class, which sets the first standard for what a good tragic story should be. The second is established afterwards, as he goes further with the juxtapositions between these genres, this time by marking their differences.

They differ, in that Epic poetry admits but one kind of metre, and is in narrative form. They differ, again, in length: for Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit; where as Epic action has no limits of time. (*Poetics* VI, 20)

First, for Aristotle, tragedy is not a narrative and can be written in more than just one meter. In this regard, Scullion (25) points out how the philosopher heavily associated a Greek form of choral song composed in honor of the god Dionysus that shared the subject matter of the heroic myth with tragic stories, alongside settings, mimetic elements, and terminology. He also clarifies that Aristotle claimed trochaic tetrameter (a poetic verse of four trochee feet) was the “characteristic of tragedy in its undignified, ‘satyric’ phase” (44), as satyrs are playful Greek deities heavily associated with Dionysus.

A further difference that he finds between tragedy and epic poetry is that the story of a tragedy, unlike in epic poetry, must unfold in the duration of one single day, if not little more, “For for Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine a itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit; whereas the Epic action has no limits of time” (*Poetics* V, 20). One last deviation is drawn between the two literary forms by the philosopher: that while all parts of an epic poem can be found in a tragedy (its structure, and potential complexity of plot), the same does not apply in reverse: epic poetry can only rely on its verse and narration and lacks the spectacle and song that tragedy utilizes.

2.2. The importance of plot and character

Aristotle puts emphasis on the importance of plot, which he defines as “the arrangement of the incidents” (*Poetics* VI, 24) and character, “the qualities of the agents” of those incidents, above everything else. Tragedy is, after all, the imitation “of an action and of life” (*Poetics* VI, 26), an event that takes place and is carried by personal agents who possess character and thought, that is, a statement that may or may not be true, and are both involved and/or affected by the course of the action. This Aristotelian relation places action and plot above character and thought. In his article “Plot and Character in Greek Tragedy” (1916), August Taber Murray proposes a series of reasons why this should be contested.

First, he mentions the contradiction of Aristotle being so interested in an intricate plot when the stories of the tragedies the Greek philosopher based his conclusion on are, in

Murray's own words, "almost negligible as an element of tragic interest" (2), pointing out that French critics in fact consider many of the scenes in these tragedies to be lacking in substance and noteworthiness. Murray expresses that it is actually the tragic characters both from ancient and modern writers (say, Oedipus, Lady Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, Antigone) that linger in the spectator's mind, much more so than the plot itself. Murray does acknowledge the significance of plot and gives credit to Aristotle's words, since "[t]here can be no portrayal of character that is in any real sense dramatic without at least a skeleton outline of plot" (4) and concedes with Arthur Bingham Walkley's *Dramatic Criticism* that Aristotle was actually making a scientific classification instead of an artistic appreciation, describing characters as forces that need an incentive to make collision (3).

The conclusion to be drawn out of this debate on Aristotelian plot and character is that, while on a technical level the philosopher himself considered plot to be a necessary element for characters to take action (thus placing it above in importance), characters are really where the heart of any tragedy lays. Furthermore, they may often be the most memorable and crucial elements for the audience.

2.3. Other subsidiary elements

In the Aristotelian conception, tragedy is made of other subsidiary elements of tragedy coming right below plot and character in a scale of importance. The first one is thought (*Poetics* VI, 26). Aristotle describes thought as where the real expression of character lays: The spectator cannot always tell the true intentions and morality of the characters by external dialogue alone. Therefore, for a good Greek tragedy to have its desired effect, the internal feelings and beliefs of the characters ought to be explored. Diction, or the way in which phrases are expressed, comes afterwards (*Poetics* VI, 26). Its relevance lies in the conviction that words must be carefully chosen so the verbal utterance of the characters causes a reaction in the audience. Song and scenery are the elements that Aristotle considers to be the least relevant of all, as their function is mostly just ornamental, something a tragedy could go without. Nevertheless, he does state that between the two, scenery is "the least artistic" (*Poetics* VI, 26-28).

2.4. Structure: metabasis, peripetia, anagnorisis and catharsis

Further on, Aristotle affirms that a plot must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, stressing the importance of a plot having continuity, "[a] well-constructed plot, therefore,

must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to the type here described” (*Poetics* VII, 28). It must be perceived by the audience with a sense of unity.

According to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the turning point of the plot is the metabasis. This is usually understood as a “change of fortune” for the hero, which results in a sequence of events that change for better or for worse the character’s situation and state of being. Next comes the peripetia, generally translated as a “reversal of Fortune.” Aristotle defines it as “a change by which a train of action produces the opposite of the effect intended; and that, according to our rule of probability or necessity” (*Poetics* XI, 36). This peripetia is followed by an anagnorisis, which is defined as “a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune” (*Poetics* XI, 38). Aristotle also notes that the best form of anagnorisis is one that interconnects directly with the reversal of fortune. He uses the story of Oedipus as an example of the connection between peripetia and anagnorisis: the peripetia is the messenger telling Oedipus about his origin in hopes of making him feel better, but ending up producing the opposite effect and changing his luck as the truth reveals itself, which is the recognition of said change of fortune.

Related to the peripetia and anagnorisis lies the tragic incident, which is explained by Aristotle to be “a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily torments, wounds and the like” (*Poetics* XI, 38). A tragic incident is an accidental event that folds out and brings an exuberating pain to its victim(s), those presumably being the heroes the audience is meant to sympathize with. This tragic incident is to a great degree related to violence and death.

The last key element in the structure of a tragedy is not so much related to the fictionalized world and characters of the tragedy itself, but to the effect it has in its observers. A catharsis is commonly agreed upon by interpreters to be “brought about by means of pity and fear, or through incidents arousing these emotions” (301). This relates directly to the Greek definition of the word as a purification of the emotions, thus creating in the audience of a tragic story a sense of fear and pity that originates from the correct application of the structural format.

2.5. The tragic hero and hamartia

This relates to another aspect that Aristotle defended had to be present to construct a good tragedy concerning the hero of the story: He must be “a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty” (*Poetics* XIII, 42). For him, the tragic protagonist should not represent an ideal of moral perfection, and yet, he should likewise not be villain-like. He understands that if the protagonist of a tragedy falls far on either extreme of goodness or evilness, the audience will feel a sense of alienation and not be able to relate and pity him, effectively failing at the core objective of a tragedy. One cannot identify oneself with a character that presents an inhumane brilliance of morality, just as it is near impossible to feel a sense of sympathy towards the suffering of an irredeemably corrupt character.

The tragic failing of a hero is directly connected to the subject of what is known as hamartia, a term about which there have been different interpretations throughout time. In Henry Alonzo Myers’ seminal article, “Aristotle’s Study of Tragedy” (1949), the author wrote, “the man, neither vicious and depraved nor eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune is brought on by some failure (hamartia) to find the path of wise and virtuous conduct” (6), implying that a tragic hero experiences his hamartia when he fails to do moral good, it is a flaw of virtue in his actions, in line with “[s]ome interpreters of the *Poetics* [who] have reduced tragedy to the level of melodrama by insisting that the hero’s hamartia is a sin” (7) and perhaps with the morals of the author’s time. This is and has still been the most common interpretation of the Aristotelian term. In contrast, philologist Ho Kim’s “Aristotle’s Hamartia Reconsidered” (2010) revisits the original term “hamartia” in the context of the other occurrences of the word as it appears in other Greek texts. As a result of his philological study, the term is seen to have meant something very different, “ignorance of the particular one’s action, especially including misidentification of close blood-relatives” (2). In Kim’s understanding, hamartia should be interpreted, not as a moral failure from the tragic hero, but as an act of ignorance about his own self, a lack of knowledge on his end. This is certainly a great addition to criticism on Aristotelian tragedy.

3. The tragedy of *Arcane*

Is the Netflix series *Arcane* a modern actualization of the ancient Greek tragedy? The answer to this inquiry is a complex one. At first glance, the series does not seem to fit into

Aristotle's definition: it is not a play nor is it represented by actors in the way the medium traditionally was. However, there is the factor of intermediality that plays into the relationship between different forms of art, which allows for one media format to be adapted into another. On this basis, Aristotle's rules that were originally intended for ancient Greek stage plays will be conveyed into *Arcane* as a modern animated television show. Logically and as mentioned before, certain aspects that theatre acting provides will not be applied to such a different form of media, but the more important elements of plot and character have as much of a presence in *Arcane* as they do in its originally intended format.

3.1. The absence of unity of time and thought

It is obvious that the story in this first season of *Arcane* is not confined to the duration of twenty-four hours, but instead takes many years to reach its conclusion, with an important skip in time happening in the first half of the episodes. *Arcane* also breaks the expectations of aristocratic protagonists, as the two main characters, Vi and Jinx, the orphaned sisters of Zaun, are rather underdogs raised in the poorest part of their world who will try their best to gain dignity in their status and change the system. The importance of thought in the characters is left behind: the audience very rarely, if ever, gets to hear the characters' inner thoughts; a lot of the times it is very hard to decipher what the true intentions of the characters are, following a show-don't-tell mindset through which the viewers are left in the dark about what these characters are planning up until it is eventually revealed through an action or a dialogue.

Let us pause here for a moment to see how, in fact, this absence on the recourse of thought is taken advantage of by the writers of *Arcane* to provide tension, as they play with the audience's expectations of what is going to happen, only for them to turn those expectations upside down. A good example of this is found in a key scene of episode nine during which two of Silco's business partners, Finn and Renni, confront him and plan on turning on him ("The Monster You Created" 11:01-13:03). During this conversation, Sevika – one of Silco's closest allies, arguably his right-hand woman – is showcasing allegiance by standing at his right side. However, as the scene progresses and Silco lectures Finn about loyalty, Sevika is shown silently wielding out a sword right behind him. Everything leading up to this scene is a clear indication for the watchers to expect Sevika to have joined Finn and Renni in their mission to take out Silco: From the way in which Sevika had betrayed Vander before, to her previously established disdain of Silco's

adoptive daughter Jinx, to another scene in the beginning of this same episode in which Finn and Sevika shared meaningful looks after Silco left (“The Monster You Created” 04:34-04:44). All this hints that an important conversation took place in that instance between the three of them, a conversation in which Finn and Renni managed to bring Sevika into their side, promising to reward her cooperation.

Anyhow, these presuppositions are reversed when, in the moment in which Silco utters, “I still believe in loyalty”, Sevika, with a quick move of her sword, aims at Finn. In the end, she proved herself trustworthy, and it was the traitor’s neck she sliced instead of Silco’s. This moment of tension and shock is achieved by the lack of inner thought in *Arcane*: There is no point in which the audience gets into Sevika’s mind to hear her thoughts and feelings on the things happening around her. Instead, we are only given a direct answer through her actions. In this case, this scene and its contextual built-up reveal to the spectator Sevika’s nature, how idealistic she is and how her loyalty seems to be bound to her leader’s cause more so than the leader himself. That is why she turned against Vander when she saw his integrity falter, but fought by Silco’s side until the end.

There are more examples of this rejection to provide explicit thought and embracement of showing through actions. Is it possible, then, that action is in fact placed above thought in *Arcane* just as much as it was in the Aristotelian tragedy?

3.2. Action and plot

Indeed, despite the faults of unity of time and space, the main point of Aristotle’s definition of tragedy being an imitation of an action, does seem to be present in *Arcane*. The story is carried by the actions of the characters and by the circumstances surrounding them, and these actions are, for the most part, very consequential and complete.

One key example of this is the small decision of Powder to take the gemstones she finds in Jayce’s room during the first episode (“Welcome to the Playground” 00:44-10:51), which, while seemingly inconsequential at first, inadvertently derives in every big tragic event that happens throughout the series. Because of this action, Powder got herself and her loved ones in conflict with the Piltover Enforcers, along with exposing Jayce’s illegal activities to the council and everything that came after the fact.

Another example of the importance of action in *Arcane*, is found in the storyline of one of the main deuteragonists, Viktor. In episode five, the main inner conflict of this

character is set: He finds himself dealing with a terminal illness (“Everybody Wants to Be My Enemy” 09:42-10:01), and as Jayce’s closest friend and business partner, together they try to find a cure for him by using the arcane magic they had been working with for years now. Viktor, however, finds himself getting too enthralled with these experiments, putting his life in the line for them, along with becoming ambitious, and eventually not only wanting to cure his illness but also to fix the disability of his leg he had since he was a child. This action perpetuated by Viktor eventually results in the death of the person who admired him the most: his assistant and childhood friend Sky. She dies in episode eight in a desperate expression of her deep love for him, as she tries to save him from one of these experiments (“Oil and Water” 26:37-27:28). It takes such a devastating consequence of Viktor’s action for him to finally put an end to this cycle, and almost lose all hope in his life.

The importance of the plot as the main driving force also seems present in *Arcane*: Although the characters by themselves play a very important role in the development of the plot, the main tragic events happen mostly due to external forces. Whether that is because of their environmental circumstances, or by the mere concept of luck, which is likewise very present throughout the entire season. This idea of mere circumstances being the determining factor for the outcome of a character’s actions is what defines and makes Jinx a tragic character. She does not start off having bad intentions, in fact, Powder is presented as a well-intentioned but insecure child who is trying to better herself and her abilities to become more like her big sister whom she looks up to. Yet, she comes to realize that no matter her intentions, the plot is set against her, and in the end, she is just a jinx, who carries bad luck in whatever she tries to do and consequently hurts those around her.

In the first episode, Mylo claims that their mission took a wrong turn because they decided to bring Powder along, and that “she jinxes every job” (“Welcome to the Playground” 19:31-19:34), to which Vi responds in her sister’s defense telling him to drop that. The truth is that, as mean-spirited as it is for Mylo to say, the reason the looting and everything afterwards went downhill was, in fact, Powder. The explosion that caused the Enforcers to go after them was caused by the gemstones that fell off when Powder took them, and the reason they did not even get to keep their loot was also because Powder’s invention failed to work and she got herself cornered. Moreover, the accident that marks the end of the first act that will be further explained in the next point, also happened due to circumstances playing against Powder’s actions. Not only because her ignorant attempt

at helping causes such a thing, but also because it is made clear that right before she made her move, things were turning up for the better, and would most likely have been fine had she not intervened.

This is specifically devastating and cruel from a narrative point of view, due to it being set up as the big moment of the hero: This is the first time an invention of Powder worked and had the chance to prove her as capable, but the plot rejects the conventional reward of triumph and ultimately decides to make this the moment in which she hits rock bottom and gets separated from her sister instead. The one time it could be argued the plot played in her favor was in episode seven, when she tries to blow Ekko and herself up with a grenade (“The Boy Savior” 35:37-35:47), but she survives with the help of Silco. However, considering this was an attempt at taking her own life, it could be argued that this was the plot also jinxing her own suicide. Then, of course, in the final episode, she not only accidentally shoots someone she deeply cared for, but she also jinxes the very possible and long-awaited peace between Zaun and Piltover.

This is not unique to Jinx, however, even if she is the biggest example of a character being dependent on external circumstances. The other characters are also often deprived of personal choices made from their own volition and are instead forced to react to the world and the things happening and changing around them. Jayce, for example, is another main character who is affected and altered in various occasions by forces of the plot outside of his control. His obsession with learning how to control unknown powers stems from having met a user of said powers in the past, who appeared just in time to save his mother’s life when he was a child (“Some Mysteries Are Better Left Unresolved” 01:35-03:35). His life gets then saved again in the same episode, when after being expelled from the university of Piltover for keeping arcane elements illegally, he considers ending his life by jumping from the ruins of his apartment and is about to do so before he gets saved by Viktor appearing just in time (31:44-31:57). Funnily enough, it seems that luck for Jayce, unlike for Jinx, almost plays in his favor. Even when things look ugly for him after he gets caught having those forbidden gemstones, he still not only gets a considerably smaller punishment than expected, but that is also what eventually leads him into meeting Viktor. Together, and along with Mel’s secret help, they take the risk of trying to neutralize and control those arcane powers in spite of the council’s ruling, which results in success and eventually shoots up his career and influence (“The Base Violence Necessary for Change” 25:23-27:01).

Arcane presents the element of plot as a subjugator, one with an overwhelming presence of luck and circumstances that serves to either victimize or elevate its main characters.

3.3. Metabasis, peripetia, and anagnorisis in Jinx's story

Arcane does not follow one single plotline, as it has subplots, different perspectives, and a remarking time skip in episode four; and consequently, there is more than one key moment of Jinx's story that would fall under metabasis, peripetia and anagnorisis for Jinx's story.

The first change of fortune (metabasis) happens during the first episode and sets up the tone for the next two. It starts when Powder decides to take with her the mysterious blue gemstones she finds in Jayce's study room, which begins a significant chain of events that changes the trajectory of her family's life. When one of the gems accidentally falls off, it causes a big explosion that immediately puts them on the radar ("Welcome to the Playground" 11:13-12:13). What was supposed to be a silent looting mission has now called for the attention of all Enforcers in the area, who notice the group and go after them. After managing to escape from the Enforcers, the children head back to Zaun. However, on their way, they have a clash with a group of fellow Zaunites who heard about the robbery they had just committed up in Piltover, and they corner them to try and take their loot (14:54-15:16). This results in a fight, during which Powder is left alone with the plunder and chased off into a corner, only finding a way out by sacrificing and throwing their stolen goods to the water (18:39-18:48). After this, not only have the main heroes put a direct target on their back for the Piltover Enforcers, but they also did not even manage to keep what got them in trouble in the first place (except for the gemstones, which Powder had kept apart).

This change of fortune leads to its reversal (peripetia) in episodes two, and mainly, three. The situation is tense, as the Enforcers have made it clear that they are going to make someone pay for the robbing and property damage caused by Powder and company. The second episode ends with Vi deciding to surrender herself to the Enforcers and take the burden for the whole accident after having a talk with her sister and with Vander ("Some Mysteries Are Better Left Unresolved" 36:04-36:37). The third episode quickly changes this notion, however, as Vander appears in the last moment to lock Vi up and take her place instead ("The Base Violence Necessary for Change" 03:30). But things do not

go as expected, and the Enforcers, Vander, and his friend Benzo, get attacked by Silco. A henchman that he had experimented on with strange substance called Shimmer not only brutally murders the sheriff (05:19-05:26) but also Benzo (05:54-06:03). As Vi helplessly watches from a small window, Silco additionally takes Vander as a prisoner (06:36-07:04). Vi eventually gets liberated by Ekko, and she runs off to tell Mylo, Claggor, and of course, Powder. The three eldest decide to take on the mission to go rescue Vander, and the sisters have their first big argument as Powder tries to convince Vi to let her join them. However, she wants to protect her younger sister, and in frustration ends up telling her that she is “not ready” (16:30). She immediately tries to make it better, but Powder is nevertheless left feeling hopeless as she watches them go.

The big accident and reversal of fortune takes place when Powder decides to make use of the powerful gemstones and put them into one of her gadgets. Then, she goes to Silco’s hideaway, and when from the window she sees her sister and the others struggling against the monstrous henchman, she decides to take action: she uses her invention to set off the power of two of the gems, which in result creates an explosion similar to the one from the first episode. Yet, this does not go as Powder intended, as said explosion does not end with the Shimmer monster and with Silco, and in turn its side effects are catastrophic: Mylo and Claggor tragically lose their lives (“The Base Violence Necessary for Change” 28:55-29:15), and while Vander manages to take Vi out before the whole place burns down, he finally passes away too (34:39-34:51).

The recognition that is tied to the reversal of fortune (anagnorisis) is very much present in this first act of *Arcane*, as it follows up directly on the same episode of the tragic incident caused by Powder. At that moment, she is completely unaware, since when the explosion happens, the first thing shown to the audience is how its shock wave throws her (seemingly) far away (“The Base Violence Necessary for Change” 28:18-28:26). This results in her being left feeling content that her invention worked, and under the impression that she did something good and saved her family just like she intended to. That is, up until the moment in which she goes back and encounters Vi again. During this entire scene (35:10-36:32) Powder is faced with reality and goes from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge, being hit both mentally and physically with the consequences of her actions. Vi loses her temper and yells at her, slaps her across the face with force and shouts the hurtful words, “Because you’re a jinx. Do you hear me? Mylo was right” (35:54). This is the moment that marks Powder’s first self-realization of her nature as a jinx, along

with being the moment in which Vi, from her perspective, abandons her as she is left to be under Silco's wing (37:10-38:55).

The second act of the series presents a different although related structure of metabasis, peripetia and anagnorisis. This time, the metabasis occurs once Caitlyn decides to carry out her investigation to take Silco and his drug empire down and liberates Vi from Piltover's prison under the condition that she accompanies her to the undercity. ("Everybody Wants to Be My Enemy" 02:37-05:04). During this mission, both women go down to Zaun, and Vi has an encounter with Sevika, which results in a bar brawl between the two. Vi gets saved by Caitlyn, but Sevika has no intention of keeping this clash a secret, and she later uses it to get on Jinx's nerves, saying, "It's your sister. She's back. She's looking for you. It's not what you think. She's with some girl Enforcer. Guess she replaced you" ("When These Walls Come Tumbling Down" 11:35-11:52).

Now Jinx knows that her big sister is out on the streets – seemingly searching for her. But she is also accompanied by a Piltover Enforcer, one of their enemies. Over and above that, Sevika's teasing about Jinx being "replaced" as the most important person in Vi's life, plants the seed to a very real dread that she will grow to experience, along with a disproportionate animosity towards Caitlyn's presence. *Honorablefrogger* considers this moment to be Jinx's first anagnorisis, and although it is not as life-altering as the one that will come further along the journey during this act, it is easy to see why they would make that point: it is in fact a meaningful change in Jinx's state of mind, going from ignorance to knowledge. However, this anagnorisis, unlike the previous one, lacks a tragic event to be linked back to.

When Jinx finally calls for and meets Vi for the first time years later, in that same episode, her identity crisis and conflictive feelings take a wild turn, as being near Vi makes her feel and act like Powder again. When she tells her big sister, "Things changed when you left. I changed" ("When These Walls Come Tumbling Down" 34:14), it almost sounds like she is not quite happy with what she has become, and she is insecure about how Vi may feel about her new self. Then, Caitlyn appears, and she sees that Sevika was right: Vi is indeed wandering around with an Enforcer, which messes with Jinx's mind even further – the sister she had grown up with would never do such a thing. Furthermore, when Caitlyn points out Jinx's possession of a gemstone she had previously stolen and used to commit terrorist attacks on Piltover, she misrepresents this as Vi having come for that, and not her ("When These Walls Come Tumbling Down" 34:34-35:18).

After this chaotic reunion with her sister, Jinx's fortune keeps changing as the two get separated once again when they get attacked by Ekko and his group of rebels called "Firelights", which ends with Vi and Caitlyn being taken hostage by them ("When These Walls Come Tumbling Down" 35:59-38:14). Eventually, Ekko and Jinx directly see each other face to face, and they have a confrontation ("The Boy Savior" 33:35-35:25) which results in Ekko defeating Jinx and pinning her down, as both reminisce their friendship as children. Jinx decides then and there to set off one last grenade in a futile attempt to end her life (35:37-35:46). In the next episode, however, Silco finds her passed out, and, in a panic, takes her to his drug scientist so that he can try and save her life ("Oil and Water" 08:29-09:21), to which he succeeds. This solution, although keeping her alive, in turn also makes Jinx more powerful, and even more unstable.

This all leads up to Jinx's final peripetia, which happens in the climax of the last episode of the season. Previously, the council was foreseeing a war that could break out between Zaun and Piltover and advocated for a peaceful solution; but Jayce was not satisfied and teamed up with Vi to go and take Silco's empire down by force ("Oil and Water" 28:14-29:59). However, Jayce ends up immediately regretting this mission when it results in the death of a child that was working there (34:10-34:35). It is then and there that he decides Mel and the council were right, and avoiding war is the best option. And so, in the next episode, he meets up with Silco to negotiate peace. Jayce offers to give him his longed independence from Piltover under one condition: "Get me Jinx. And I'll give you your nation of Zaun" ("The Monster You Created" 15:56). This leaves Silco in despair as he talks to Vander's memorial statue about what he should do, uttering the words: "Is there anything so undoing as a daughter?" (17:52). It is revealed then that Jinx was hiding behind the statue, listening to this "conversation" between her father figures, which leaves her under the impression that Silco is in fact, going to betray her. And so, she decides to organize a family "dinner" to set her thoughts straight, to which she takes Vi, Caitlyn and Silco hostage to participate in it: The final battle for Jinx' soul.

She proceeds to tell Vi to shoot Caitlyn, "Make her go away. Please. Send her on her way and ... you can have Powder back" ("The Monster You Created" 28:38-28:48). Vi is unwilling to do this, which leads to Jinx threatening to go through with it herself. In a moment of distraction, while Jinx hears Silco out, Caitlyn manages to free herself from the rope holding her down, and seemingly gains the upper hand as she takes ahold of one of Jinx's guns ("The Monster You Created" 30:16- 30:31). However, this apparent

triumph does not last long, as Jinx takes advantage of the Shimmer running through her veins to make a swift attack on Caitlyn, effectively taking her down (31:26-31:33). This is where the confrontation between Jinx's identities take place, as Vi and Silco both scream at her to do different things, "You see, now finish it", and "Damn it! Powder, wake up!" (31:35-31:39).

Just as Silco freed his hands and took hold of a gun to kill Vi, Jinx mindlessly shot at one of the chairs, with the victim being revealed to have been Silco. This violent moment marks Jinx's second main reversal of fortune, although much more abrupt and not as violent as the first one. Jinx's anagnorisis arrives right after, as she comes back to her senses and realizes that she has once again taken the life out of someone she considered to be family. In his final words, Silco tells her, "I never would have given you to them. Not for anything. Don't cry. You're perfect" ("The Monster You Created" 32:53-33:11), which clears all ignorance left in Jinx's mind about her true identity as a jinx. She acknowledges this newfound self-awareness as she prepares to commit the act that will solidify said identity. She powers up the gun Caitlyn had attempted to use against her, and while Jayce manages to convince every councilman and woman to vote in favor of granting Zaun independence, Jinx launches a missile aimed directly at them.

The catharsis of emotions for the watchers of *Arcane* is then made clear: the feelings of pity and fear are a constant throughout every episode, which is made possible by the way the tragedy is structured, the common use of cliffhangers at the end of many of the episodes, and by the characterization of the main heroes, which will now be extensively discussed.

3.4. Jinx and Vi as tragic heroines

It is time to see whether *Arcane* follows Aristotle's model of a tragic hero, along with checking in if there is a hamartia, and which interpretation of the concept it follows. This analysis will focus on the characters of Powder/Jinx and Vi. As *honorablefrogger* mentioned in their video, arguably every other important character also fits in Aristotle's description of a tragic hero, but analyzing each one of them would be impossible to do under the limitations of length and time for this dissertation.

The first requisite is that the hero ought not to be a beacon of virtue, while also not villainous in nature. The character of Jinx fits quite well in this framing, or, for better accuracy, Powder does. The very first act the audience sees Powder and Vi doing in their

introduction is one of mischief: they are actively robbing from an unknown person from the upper city, and they gather every little thing they find in Jayce's place. Afterwards, they escape from the authorities, and get into a street fight. This paints a picture of Powder, along with Vi, not being perfect little angels. Admittedly, it could be argued that the former is more innocent, due to her being significantly younger and just following her big sister, who is the actual leader of the group. But regardless of that, Powder still has no trouble going along with it, even keeping some of that loot for herself, and only ever telling Vi about it ("Welcome to the Playground" 36:31-36:38). Despite this, these actions are seen as understandable and forgivable, as the series shows you the poor living conditions of the undercity of Zaun in contrast to those of Piltover, along with the fact that these characters at this point are still just children, who are bound to act reckless. On top of that, Powder is characterized in a way that could connect with many, and she is very easy to feel bad for. She is not as strong, both physically and mentally, as her big sister whom she admires and has a co-dependent bond with, which makes her deeply insecure about her role in the team. She cannot fight, her inventions do not work, and it is even noted, mainly by Mylo, that when she is brought along for a mission, she often messes up.

Honorablefrogger considers Powder's strong attachment to her sister to be her fatal flaw, and although that is arguably true, said bond is likewise one of her main sources of motivation. This makes sense given how young she still is, and how even younger she was when she lost both her parents. Vi became the figure that protected and cared for her the most, and it is her approval and the hope of one day becoming just like her that keep Powder going. This has its bad side, though, as it also means that her self-image is very dependent on how Vi sees her, and it can be observed how personally affected she is in the few instances in which her big sister seems to not see her in a good light. An example of this is found in episode one, in which Powder overhears a conversation Vi was having with Mylo about her, an exchange in which her role model appeared to agree with the boy on how incapable she was ("Welcome to the Playground" 27:51-28:45) which makes Powder run off immediately. She misses, however, that Vi was actually mocking Mylo instead of genuinely bad-mouthing her. When Vi goes to see Powder again in a later scene, she reassures her and motivates her to keep trying her hardest ("Welcome to the Playground" 34:28-36:27).

Because of this, Powder is a character that, while not morally perfect, ultimately does not have any evil intentions, and it is easy to relate to and pity her when the first reversal of luck takes place. Powder's hamartia fits more into the modern perception of the concept, as her downfall is not product of a moral failure, but an act of ignorance. This ignorance in part refers to her lack of experience and knowledge on arcane powers, but most importantly, her lack of knowledge about herself. At this point, she is the farthest away she has been in the story from embracing her identity as a jinx. While she did have doubts and was insecure about her abilities, Vi's reassurance convinced her that she can truly do good and take control of the narrative. Inevitably, this misinformation about herself Powder had come around to believe comes crashing down completely for the first time after her bad luck violently destroys her family and separates her from her beloved sister.

Yet, Powder's new identity of Jinx is a different case. Jinx is much more malicious in nature, as she works with the main villain of the series, going as far as to see him as a father, and her acts of mischief are amplified as they now take lives and legitimately hurt those around her. Jinx's very first action when she is newly introduced in episode four is mercilessly attacking the Firelights, and shooting a girl who reminded her of Vi in cold blood ("Happy Progress Day!" 09:22-09:54). But despite this, and at least until the last episode, there are still traces of Powder to be seen in her, mainly when she shows vulnerability, a key instance being in episode six when she reunites with Vi ("When These Walls Come Tumbling Down" 33:31-34:36). This, together with the fact that she shows genuine symptoms of a severe untreated mental illness due to her trauma, and that she has been manipulated by her codependent father figure since she was very young, makes it quite easy for the audience to still sympathize with and pity her.

The tragic-Greek-hero nature of Jinx is then left in a strange place, as she is clearly no longer a good person with good intentions, but the audience is nonetheless left not wanting bad things to happen to her and connecting to her in a way. This hamartia, however, contrasts with that of her as Powder, since it did not originate completely from a place of ignorance, instead fitting better with the older interpretation of it being a moral failure. She did know what she was doing when she organized the dinner, and she did know she was taking a gun and shooting at Silco when she did so. This final accident did not happen because of a state of unawareness, but it was a result of the dangerous explosiveness of her new-found, much less virtuous identity.

Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that Jinx's hamartia does fall a little bit into the modern vision of the concept. Reuniting with Vi indeed made her question herself once again, wondering for the first time in years if maybe she had gotten it all wrong, and she was not the jinx she had been convinced she was. The reason she decided to prepare the family reunion in the first place was in hopes of clearing up her confusion and finding out the truth about her identity once and for all.

Vi, similarly to her sister, also fits Aristotle's mold of a tragic Greek hero: she does not present a perfect morality in any way shape or form, seeing as she leads Powder and the others into dangerous missions, completely rejecting any form of authority and not hesitating to get into physical fights, often acting impulsively. Although, just like with her sister, this makes sense given her background and age. Nevertheless, she remains a sympathetic character who deeply cares for Powder and the rest of her family, takes on a lot of responsibility, and is even willing to sacrifice herself to ensure her loved ones are safe. She is quite rough around the edges due to her circumstances, but deep inside, she has a heart of gold, and Vander directly tells her so in episode three ("The Base Violence Necessary for Change" 03:37-03:40).

Unlike with Powder, who has adopted a completely different identity as Jinx in episode four, Vi mostly keeps these characteristics throughout the entire series. If anything, presenting herself as even more rebellious and bitter of Piltover, after having lost her sister and been incarcerated and abused for years. That is, before she starts to gradually soften up to Caitlyn. Vi's hamartia fits the most that of a moral failure: although understandable, it is her impulsively violent reaction and cruel words towards Powder at the end of the first act of the series that results in them drifting away and going in different paths. That moment is the one that marked both sisters, as Vi was left unable to reach out and having to live with the guilt of deeply hurting the person she wanted to protect the most, while Powder took those hurtful words coming from her role model at heart and named herself after them ("The Monster You Created" 24:55-26:27).

However, and similarly to Jinx's case, there are still observable traces of the newer interpretation of hamartia to be found in Vi's story. The difference here seems to be that, instead of Vi not knowing her own identity, she is ignorant about her sister's. She refused to identify Powder as a jinx when they were children, and she continues to do so when they meet again all those years later, trying desperately to take back what she said to her after Powder's peripetia. This misidentification of her blood relative's identity is what

drives Jinx to question herself, and what makes her feel to need to organize the dinner. Unlike her sister, however, Vi never has a definite moment of recognition of Jinx's identity in these first nine episodes: it is a fatal flaw the audience can only hope will be solved in the upcoming season.

Both main characters of *Arcane* fit almost perfectly in the mold Aristotle set for a tragic hero: They have a glaring hamartia or fatal flaw that represents a failure either in moral or knowledge, and they present a moral grayness that makes them pitiable while remaining relatable for the audience. Of course, Vi and Powder do radically deviate from the norm in certain ways – mainly in that they are women from a low social class – but overall, they follow the rules accordingly.

Conclusion

At the start of this dissertation, a clear objective was set: to find out whether the Netflix series *Arcane* based on the game *League of Legends* could possibly fit the model of an Aristotelian Greek tragedy or not. This premise of discussion had been on my mind for years, and it was strengthened when I found a YouTube video essay that brought up and examined the idea, with its final answer to the question being a resounding “yes”. However, now having explained all of Aristotle's criteria in his book *Poetics* and later applied it to *Arcane*, the results have been quite mixed.

The series presents an accurate depiction of the structure of a tragedy in that it certainly follows through with the elements Aristotle would expect: it contains not only one but multiple instances of metabasis, peripetia, anagnorisis, and their corresponding catharsis for the audience. Jinx experiences her first change of fortune as a child when she puts herself and her family in danger because of a careless mistake and, consequently, a reversal of fortune occurs, and her family dies because of her actions. The truth about her nature as a jinx is revealed to her for the first time, and the cycle repeats itself after having grown up, until she has completely solidified her newfound identity.

Furthermore, the main characters, Vi and (especially) Jinx, fit smoothly into the basic traits linked to a tragic hero: they are pitiable and easy for the public to relate to, but ultimately doomed by their fatal flaws. Each of the sisters' hamartia resembles both that of the older interpretation of the concept and the revised modern one. They fail to do

moral good when Jinx commits egregious acts against her perceived enemies, while young Vi responds with excessive violence to her little sister's mistake. They are also deeply ignorant: Jinx is confused about her sense of self, and Vi consistently misidentifies her blood relative's identity.

At last, narratively, *Arcane* is carried the most by its usage of plot and action, instead of overly relying on an external narration or the characters by themselves. The strong presence of action, however, comes with a downside for the narrative: the third most important element of a Greek tragedy, thought, is quite neglected, as the writers rarely let the audience get inside of the character's minds. In addition to that, the structure of the plot fails at one fundamental rule set by Aristotle, which is that it does not unfold in the duration of twenty-four hours. Although it is not directly specified, the first act alone takes without question at least a few days to reach its catharsis; and moreover, a significant skip in time of around five years has taken place at the beginning of episode four. Vi and Jinx as characters present certain deviations from the norm, with them not only being from a lower social class, but also being women (though this falls back in a way to the aspect of intermediality).

Overall, although the answer to the title question of this dissertation ended up being far more complex than what *honorablefrogger* implied in their video essay and what myself had thought of years ago, there is certainly a basis for this Aristotelian interpretation of the series that make it worth examining in detail. The solution to this inquiry is thus neither a simple "yes" or a "no": *Arcane* presents characteristics that make it deserving of the modern Greek tragedy title just as much as it presents ones that revoke it. It is hard to deny the fact that if someone could take on a time machine and go back to ancient Greece to present *Arcane*'s story exactly as it is to Aristotle, his answer would have most likely been "no, this is no Greek tragedy," the moment he saw two poverty-stricken sisters as protagonists. However, because of the contemporary times we live in and the radical difference in media, we do not and cannot conceive it through those exact same lens.

All of this brings us to the final answer to the question "Is *Arcane* a Modern Greek Tragedy?", which is best left as "yes in certain regards, but no in others."

Works cited

“Arcane is a Modern Greek Tragedy (Video Essay).” *YouTube*, uploaded by honorablefrogger, 9 feb. 2022,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjBoIAdLOSs&list=PLqcPCztST53FW_PGpwyvoKUgjOGAu9jMR&index=62

Aristotle. *The Poetics*. Translated With a Critical Text by S.H. Butcher, editorial, 1895.
Internet Archive, 1895,
archive.org/details/poeticstranslate00arisuoft/page/14/mode/2up.

Gilbert, Allan H. “The Aristotelian Catharsis.” *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1926, pp. 301–14. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2178979>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2024.

Kim, Ho. “Aristotle’s ‘Hamartia’ Reconsidered.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 105, 2010, pp. 33–52. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41429141>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2024.

Murray, Augustus Taber. “Plot and Character in Greek Tragedy.” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 47, 1916, pp. 51–64. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/282827>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2024.

Myers, Henry Alonzo. “Aristotle’s Study of Tragedy.” *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1949, pp. 115–27. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3203554>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2024.

Scullion, Scott. “Tragedy and Religion: The Problem of Origins.” *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2008, pp. 40–55.