The birth of the modern western civilization was ancient Greece, the home of some of the earliest philosophers, as well as playwrights. Aristotle, a philosopher who lived during the time period of 384-322 BCE in ancient Greece, created many works of literature on the topic of philosophy. One of his more well-known works is “The Poetics” which was published in 335 BCE. “The Poetics” was one of the first works of literature that commented on theatre, and more specifically the dramatic theory of it. One point that Aristotle makes in this work is that in a proper tragedy, the fortune or luck of an individual should start good and gradually become worse as the plot progresses. In the ancient works “Agamemnon” by Aeschylus and “The Women of Troy” by Euripides, the fortune of the stories gradually becomes worse as the plots progress.

Aristotle’s “The Poetics” covered the idea that in tragedies, the fortune of the story goes from good to bad as the plot progresses. Its contents included how certain plays should be conducted based on genre, how the plot should be constructed, and how the characters were to react. Aristotle defined tragedy as “an imitation of an action that is complete, and of a certain magnitude” (Aristotle, VI). Aristotle defined tragedy to be this because the actor imitates actions that lead to incidents that occurred within the plot. Aristotle also broke tragedy down into five sub-sections that are character, plot, diction, song, and thought, and he believed that the most important sub-section was the “structure of the incidents” (Aristotle, VI), or plot. Aristotle believed that plot was the most important part of a tragedy because the plot determined what actions the character or actor will make. If the plot were to have too little substance, the viewer would not be able to determine its worth, and if the plot were to have too much substance, the viewer would be overwhelmed and would not be able to admire the
different parts within the plot. Aristotle made an exception in his reasoning when he said that a proper plot will have a “sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good” (Aristotle, VII). Aristotle believed that the plot of a tragedy should be structured like this because it allowed the viewer to comprehend the events. Also, being structured allowed the plot to have a unity of events that occur.

In “Agamemnon”, the fortune of the story is presented as being good in the beginning, but as the plot progresses towards the eventual death of Agamemnon, the fortune becomes bad. In the beginning, the fortune is presented to be good because after ten years of fighting the Trojan War, the Greeks were finally able to return to their homelands. On page 1, the watchman says, “But now at last fair fall the welcome hour... Greetings to fortune, hail”, and the Argive elders who make up the chorus say, “Ten livelong years have rolled away, since the twin lords have sceptered away”. The people of Argive have good fortune during this time because the Greeks are returning victorious. However, the people of Argive are also aware that in the future the fortune will not be as good. In page 3, the elders of Argive say, “And yet-farewell, O secret of To-morrow! Foreknowledge is fore-sorrow.” This phrase spoken by the elders gives evidence to their knowledge of the bad future that will befall on them. When the elders speak of “Foreknowledge”, they treat it as something bad because they know that the future will not be good because knowing the future is just experiencing the sorrow earlier. The sorrow that the elders knew of was foreshadowed when they said this because the person who has foreknowledge is Cassandra. Cassandra’s foreknowledge lead to her have fore-sorrow on page 11 and 12. Cassandra’s foreknowledge is of her death on page 12 where it said, “And I--burning heart!--shall lie low as well.” Cassandra’s foreknowledge of her death brought her fore-sorrow as the
elders said because Cassandra did not wish to die. This supports Aristotle’s idea that in tragedies, the fortune goes from good to bad as the plot progresses. On page 15, Cassandra revealed that Agamemnon had been slain when she said, “See, ill they did, and ill requites them now. His death ye know...” The Chorus then reacted negatively in response to the king’s death on page 15 when they said, “Now my lord slain, the gracious among kings!” The Chorus’ response to Cassandra’s revealed that Agamemnon had been killed evidences the idea that the fortune at this moment was bad. This exchange between Cassandra and the Chorus supported Aristotle’s idea about fortune in tragedies because the fortune in the beginning was good as the result of the king had returned from a 10 year war, but then turned bad when the king was found to be murdered. Aristotle’s idea of a tragedy having fortune go from good to bad as the plot progresses is evident in “Agamemnon” because the fortune at the beginning was good due to the king’s victorious return, but gradually became worse as Cassandra predicted the king’s death as well as her death, and finally reached its worst point when the king was found to be murdered.

In “The Women of Troy” by Euripides, the fortune is presented as going from good with the survival of the women of Troy, but gradually becomes worse as the plot progresses towards the trial of Helen. When the play was introduced, the fortune of the women was good because instead of being part of the burning city in the background, they are safe near the Aegean ships. On page 130, Hecabe attempts to raise Trojan morale by saying, “Lift your neck from the dust; up with your head! This is not Troy...Bear what you must.” Hecabe says this because she knows that being alive is better than being dead. The other women around her do not believe this, so Hecabe tries to give them hope. However, as the plot progresses, Hecabe realizes that fortune has gone from good to bad when Hecabe learns that her daughter
Cassandra is to become the concubine of Agamemnon, and her other daughter Polyxena has been made an attendant at Achilles’ tomb, or killed. Hecabe thought that Cassandra had a “miserable fate” (Pg. 132) and that Polyxena was forced to be with a dead man. This reaction from Hecabe shows the fortune of the story going from good to bad because in the beginning she considered her fortune to be good because she was still alive, but now, her fortune is starting to turn bad as she learns about the deaths of her daughters. Hecabe does not realize that Polyxena is dead until a Trojan woman tells her directly. Hecabe’s own fortune became worse when she learned that she had become property of Odysseus. Hecabe reacted by saying, “Odysseus? Oh! Odysseus... Cruelest fate of all” (Pg. 132). This quote from Hecabe shows her fortune becoming worse because in the beginning of the story, she was not made property of someone else. Now that the plot has progressed, she has become the property of Odysseus and is no longer free. Andromache, the daughter-in-law of Hecabe, has her fortune turn bad when she learns that the Achaeans will kill her son. On page 137, Andromache says, “This is worse than what they do to me... horrible beyond all measure” in response to Talthybius’ news of the upcoming execution of her son. Andromache’s fortune turned from good, which was her being alive, to bad, which was the execution of her son. In “The Women of Troy,” the fortune of the women is good at the beginning because they are alive after the war, but gradually becomes worse as the plot progresses with the execution of Hector’s son, the distribution to different victors, and the discovery of the fates of different Trojans such as Cassandra and Polyxena.

In “Agamemnon” by Aeschylus and “The Trojan Women” by Euripides, the fortune of the story goes from good too bad as the plot progresses. The idea that the fortune of the story goes from good to bad is a point that Aristotle makes in his work, “Poetics.” The two works
“Agamemnon” and “The Women of Troy” both reveal the nature of the people during the time period because they both allowed the audience to pity with a specific character. In “Agamemnon,” the audience could pity Cassandra because she was trying to warn the people of the possible death of their king, Agamemnon, but despite her efforts she was ignored. In “The Women of Troy,” the audience could pity Hecabe because she was a queen of a conquered land stripped from power, and did not even know the fate of her daughter Polyxena until she was told directly that Polyxena had died. The ideals of tragedy made by Aristotle influenced into famous plays written over two millennia afterward such as “Romeo and Juliet” and “Julius Caesar” by Shakespeare, where the fortune of the characters starts off as good but gradually becomes worse as the plot develops.