

MODERN EUROPEAN DRAMA

Prof. Dr.Nilesh P. Sathvara (M.A., Ph.D.)
ShriH.K.Arts College,
Ahmedabad – Gujarat (India)

Abstract

Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance. The enactment of drama in theatre, performed by actors on a stage before an audience, presupposes collaborative modes of production and a collective form of reception. Tragedy is the major form of drama besides comedy. A tragic plot is more linear than a comic plot. Tragic heroes and heroines in traditional drama are above ordinary people because of their social rank and strong personality.

Key Words

Drama, Features of a Play,History, Types of Drama, Comedy, Tragedy, Tragic Hero and Heroine, Language in Drama.

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Drama

Drama is a unique tool to explore and express human feeling,

Drama is an essential form of behaviour in all cultures, it is a fundamental human activity.

In this site we are investigating the benefits Drama can have on child development when applied functionally within a primary classroom. Drama has the potential, as a diverse medium, to enhance cognitive, affective and motor development.

A high degree of thinking, feeling and moving is involved and subsequently aids in the development of skills for all other learning within and outside of schools (transfer of learning).

Drama is a discrete skill in itself (acting, theatre, refined skill), and therefore it is offered as a 'subject' in secondary school. However Drama is also a tool which is flexible, versatile and applicable among all areas of the curriculum. Through its application as a tool in the primary classroom, Drama can be experienced by all children.

Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance. The term comes from a Greek word meaning "action" (Classical Greek: *anTiá*, drama), which is derived from "to do" (Classical Greek: *añUu*, drao). The two masks associated with drama represent the traditional generic division between comedy and tragedy. They are symbols of the ancient Greek Muses, Thalia and Melpomene. Thalia was the Muse of comedy (the laughing face), while Melpomene was the Muse of tragedy (the weeping face). Considered as a genre of poetry in general, the dramatic mode has been contrasted with the epic and the lyrical modes ever since Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE)-the earliest work of dramatic theory.

The term is also a synonym for play A "restricted usage" of "drama", in a narrow sense to designate a specific type of play, originated with Frenchmen Diderot and Beaumarchais in the

18th century. Drama in this sense refers to a "serious play, not necessarily a tragedy". It is this narrow sense that the film and television industry and film studies adopted to describe "drama" as a genre within their respective media. "Radio drama" has been used in both senses originally transmitted in a live performance, it has also been used to describe the more high-brow and serious end of the dramatic output of radio.

The enactment of drama in theatre, performed by actors on a stage before an audience, presupposes collaborative modes of production and a collective form of reception. The Structure of dramatic texts, unlike other forms of literature, is directly influenced by this collaborative production and collective reception. The early modern tragedy Hamlet(1601) by Shakespeare and the classical Athenian tragedy Oedipus the King (c. 429 BCE) by Sophocles are among the masterpieces of the art of drama. A modern example is Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill (1956).

Drama is often combined with music and dance: the drama in opera is generally sung through, musicals generally include both spoken dialogue and songs, and some forms of drama have incidental music or musical accompaniment underscoring the dialogue (melodrama and Japanese Nô, for example). In certain periods of history (the ancient Roman and modern Romantic) some dramas have been written to be read rather than performed In improvisation, the drama does not pre-exist the moment of performance, performers devise a dramatic script spontaneously before an audience Drama assists in the development of:

- the use of imagination
- powers of creative self expression
- decision making and problem solving skills
- and understanding of self and the world
- self confidence, a sense of worth and respect and consideration for others.

Features of a Play

- Plays are normally divided into major units called Acts, which are sometimes subdivided into Scenes. A scene usually shows a sequence of actions which happen in the same setting, that is, in the same place and in the same period of time. Modern plays may have one or two or three acts, whereas in the past, in the time of Shakespeare, for example, they had as many as five acts.
- A play traditionally tells a story which is organised by the playwright/dramatist in a plot. The plot contains the same events as the story but it may present them in a different chronological order. The story is slightly different from the plot because it consists of the main events arranged in chronological order. It can be quickly summarised.
- The order in which scenes and situations are arranged usually serves the purpose of creating dramatic tension, suspense and climax in order to capture the audience's attention. They are essential ingredients of a thriller.
- Before the actual text begins, you can usually find a list of the characters in the play headed either with the self-explanatory word Characters or with Cast. The characters of a play can be main/major characters or minor characters according to the importance of their role in the story. They may be well-rounded characters, and show the complexity of human psychology, or flat characters, based on only one or two aspects of personality which never change throughout the play, or stock characters, and represent human types such as the beautiful and virtuous heroine or the handsome and courageous hero in a traditional love story.
- Plays develop through direct speech, usually in the form of a dialogue between the characters but occasionally in the form of a soliloquy when a character is alone on stage and utters his/her thoughts out loud.
- Plays usually include stage directions, where the dramatist intervenes to give instructions for the play's production. You can easily recognise stage directions because they are written in italics to distinguish them from the characters' speeches.
- The aim of drama is not to re-create the world of nature but to offer a different model of our world

History

Actually, drama, as in plays and the theatre, has changed over time. The word itself comes from the Greek word meaning 'action, and it's with the Greeks and Romans that we start to define classical drama. In fact, classical drama was more than just acting out a story. These plays were highly symbolic and included music, dance, poetry and audience participation.

As Christianity spread, theatre took a religious turn, which opened the door to the morality plays of the Medieval Period in Europe, during the 15th and 16th centuries, morality plays, which featured a hero who must overcome evil, were allegorical in nature.

An allegory is a literary device where characters or events represent or symbolize other ideas and concepts. In the case of the morality plays, the hero represented mankind. The other characters served as personifications of many things, including the seven deadly sins, death, virtues and even angels and demons - anything that wanted to take over mankind's soul. In fact, this theme has transcended through many dramatic periods. Also, the fact that these plays were performed by professional actors makes them a transition between the classical drama and the plays we see today.

Of course, today we have drama popping up all over the place. There is drama for what we call the theatre, both the stage and at the movies. Staged theatre is acted out live in front of an audience. The movie theatre is a different story. This is drama that has been acted out to perfection and is presented as a recording to a live audience. The same goes for television, but on a smaller screen. Radio is a bit different, however. Most of us don't listen to many radio dramas, but if we did, we would know the actors are using their voices and probably some sound effects. Sometimes we see these elements within audio books. In the case of the Harry Potter series, the narrator, Jim Dale, goes to great lengths to create different voices for each of the characters, as if there were many actors playing the different parts.

Western drama originated in classical Greece. The theatrical culture of the city-state of Athens produced three genres of drama: tragedy, comedy, and the satyr play. Their origins remain

obscure, though by the 5th century BC they were institutionalised in competitions held as part of festivities celebrating the god Dionysus. Historians know the names of many ancient Greek dramatists, not least Thespis, who is credited with the innovation of an actor ("hypokrites") who speaks (rather than sings) and impersonates a character (rather than speaking in his own person), while interacting with the chorus and its leader ("coryphaeus"), who were a traditional part of the performance of non-dramatic poetry (dithyrambic, lyric and epic).

Only a small fraction of the work of five dramatists, however, has survived to this day. We have a small number of complete texts by the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the comic writers Aristophanes and, from the late 4th century, Menander. Aeschylus' historical tragedy *The Persians* is the oldest surviving drama, although when it won first prize at the City Dionysia competition in 472 BC, he had been writing plays for more than 25 years. The competition ("agon") for tragedies may have begun as early as 534 BC; official records ("didaskalia") begin from 501 BC, when the satyr play was introduced. Tragic dramatists were required to present a tetralogy of plays (though the individual works were not necessarily connected by story or theme), which usually consisted of three tragedies and one satyr play (though exceptions were made, as with Euripides *Alcestis* in 438 BC). Comedy was officially recognized with a prize in the competition from 487 to 486 BC.

Five comic dramatists competed at the City Dionysia (though during the Peloponnesian War this may have been reduced to three), each offering a single comedy. Ancient Greek comedy is traditionally divided between "old comedy" (5th century BC), "middle comedy" (4th century BC) and "new comedy" (late 4th century to 2nd BC).

Following the expansion of the Roman Republic (509-27 BC) into several Greek territories between 270-240 BC, Rome encountered Greek drama. From the later years of the republic and by means of the Roman Empire (27 BC-476 AD), theatre spread west across Europe, around the Mediterranean and reached England; Roman theatre was more varied, extensive and sophisticated than that of any culture before it.

While Greek drama continued to be performed throughout the Roman period, the year 240 BC marks the beginning of regular Roman drama. From the beginning of the empire, however, interest in full-length drama declined in favour of a broader variety of theatrical entertainments. The first important works of Roman literature were the tragedies and comedies that Livius Andronicus wrote from 240 BC. Five years later, Gnaeus Naevius also began to write drama. No plays from either writer have survived. While both dramatists composed in both genres, Andronicus was most appreciated for his tragedies and Naevius for his comedies, their successors tended to specialise in one or the other, which led to a separation of the subsequent development of each type of drama.

By the beginning of the 2nd century BC, drama was firmly established in Rome and a guild of writers (*collegium poetarum*) had been formed. The Roman comedies that have survived are all *fabula palliata* (comedies based on Greek subjects) and come from two dramatists: Titus Maccius Plautus (Plautus) and Publius Terentius Afer (Terence). In re-working the Greek originals, the Roman comic dramatists abolished the role of the chorus in dividing the drama into episodes and introduced musical accompaniment to its dialogue between one third of the dialogue in the comedies of Plautus and two-thirds in those of Terence). The action of all scenes is set in the exterior location of a street and its complications often follow from eavesdropping

Plautus, the more popular of the two, wrote between 205 and 184 BC and twenty of his comedies survive, of which his farces are best known; he was admired for the wit of his dialogue and his use of a variety of poetic meters. All of the six comedies that Terence wrote between 166 and 160 BC have survived, the complexity of his plots, in which he often combined several Greek originals, was sometimes denounced, but his double-plots enabled a sophisticated presentation of contrasting human behaviour. No early Roman tragedy survives, though it was highly regarded in its day, historians know of three early tragedians—Quintus Ennius, Marcus Pacuvius and Lucius Accius.

From the time of the empire, the work of two tragedians survives—one is an unknown author, while the other is the Stoic philosopher Seneca. Nine of Seneca's tragedies survive, all of which are *fabula crepidata* (tragedies adapted from Greek originals), his *Phaedra*, for example,

was based on Euripides Hippias. Historians do not know who wrote the only extant example of thefabulapraetexta (tragedies based on Roman subjects), Octavia, but in former timesit was mistakenly attributed to Seneca due to his appearance as a character in the tragedy.

In the Middle Ages, drama in the vernacular languages of Europe may have emerged from religious enactments of the liturgy Mystery plays were presented on the porch of the cathedrals or by strolling players on feast days Miracle and mystery plays, along with moralities and interludes, later evolved into more elaborate forms of drama, such as was seen on the Elizabethan stages.

One of the great flowerings of drama in England occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of these plays were written in verse, particularly iambic pentameter. In addition to Shakespeare, such authors as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton, and Ben Jonson were prominent playwrights during this period. As in the medieval period, historical plays celebrated the lives of past kings, enhancing the image of the Tudor monarchy. Authors of this period drew some of their storylines from Greek mythology and Roman mythology or from the plays of eminent Roman playwrights such as Plautus and Terence.

The pivotal and innovative contributions of the 19th-century Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and the 20th-century German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht dominate modern drama; each inspired a tradition of imitators, which include many of the greatest playwrights of the modern era. The works of both playwrights are, in their different ways, both modernism and realist, incorporating formal experimentation, meta-theatricality, and social critique. In terms of the traditional theoretical discourse of genre, Ibsen's work has been described as the culmination of "liberal tragedy", while Brecht's has been aligned with an historicised comedy. Other important playwrights of the modern era include Antonin Artaud, August Strindberg, Anton Chekhov, Frank Wedekind, Maurice Maeterlinck, Federico García Lorca, Eugene O'Neill, Luigi Pirandello, George Bernard Shaw, Ernst Toller, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Jean Genet, Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Dario Fo, Heiner Müller, and Caryl Churchill

Types of Drama

Let us consider a few popular types of drama:

- **Comedy** - Comedies are lighter in tone than ordinary writers, and provide a happy conclusion. The intention of dramatists in comedies is to make their audience laugh. Hence, they use quaint circumstances, unusual characters and witty remarks.
- **Tragedy**- Tragic dramas use darker themes such as disaster, pain and death. Protagonists often have a tragic flaw-a characteristic that leads them to their downfall.
- **Farce**- Generally, a farce is a nonsensical genre of drama, which often overacts or engages slapstick humor.
- **Melodrama** – Melodrama is an exaggerated drama, which is sensational and appeals directly to the senses of audience. Just like the farce, the characters are of single dimension and simple, or may be stereotyped.
- **Musical Drama** - In musical drama, the dramatists not only tell their story through acting and dialogue, nevertheless through dance as well as music, Often the story may be comedic, though it may also involve serious subjects.

Comedy

Comedy is a major form of drama of which the following general definition can be given: "a play in which the principal characters ordinarily begin in a state of opposition to one another or to their world - often both. By the end of the play, their opposition is replaced by harmony" (Scholes and Klaus). The main purpose of comedy is to amuse people and its main traits are humour, comic plot and flat characters.

Comic plot consists in a sequence of difficult, intricate or improbable situations in which the main characters find themselves in trouble. But problems are always overcome and the end is always happy. Love and variations on this theme are the most frequent subject matter of comedies. The events of a comic plot follow one another at such a fast pace that the audience has

no time to wonder at the improbability of the story. They accept it as a convention of comedy and enjoy the play.

Humour is the essence of comedy, it can take many forms on the stage, from the subtly amusing to the hilarious. This is what makes people laugh. It is often based on the privileged position of the audience when they know more than the characters on stage.

Let us examine these different kinds of humour in detail:

Verbal humour: Puns are also often used in comedy based on verbal humour. A pun is a play on words which have the same sound but different spellings and meanings Alternatively, it can be an amusing use of a word or phrase which has a double meaning This form of ambiguity, intrinsic to a pun, lends itself to comic effect.

Behavioural humour derives from the fact that a character's behaviour is unexpected and seems absurd in the given context on the stage.

Situational humour which is based on the audience's knowledge of an essential aspect of the situation which is unknown to some characters on the stage -eg., a double identity or a mistaken identity, an intrigue or a deception.

In comedy, characters are not usually developed in depth. They are usually flat characters because the witty dialogue and the skilful handling of comic situations are more important than the observation or development of a character's personality. Characters can represent human types, such as the miser or the coquette. They can portray social types, such as the unspoiled peasant or the snobbish aristocrat. They can be the stock characters frequently found in comedies, such as the clever servant or the bossy wife. Whatever they are, they usually remain unchanged throughout the play.

Tragedy

Tragedy is the major form of drama besides comedy It can be defined as a play in which the hero and his world begin in a condition of harmony which disintegrates, leaving him, by the end of the play, in a state of isolation" (Scholes and Klaus).

Tragic plots and tragic heroes and heroines have specific features of their own which are typical of Shakespearean plays but can be extended to cover tragedies by other playwrights as well.

A tragic plot is more linear than a comic plot. From the introductory situation it rises to a climax, which is the highest point in the protagonist's fortunes, followed by a reversal of fortune - the point of crisis - which leads to the final catastrophe.

Tragic heroes and heroines in traditional drama are above ordinary people because of their social rank and strong personality. As a consequence, their suffering is also much greater than common people could bear Their catastrophe is decreed by fate and is often started by a fatal flaw. For example, In the case of Romeo and Juliet's tragic story, the protagonists are an innocent couple who are doomed from the very beginning by a malignant fate. In the case of Macbeth, 'ambition' is the fatal flaw that drives him and his wife toward their doom. Their final fall brings down other people as well.

Soliloquy, as well as dialogue, is used in tragedy to carry the plot forward and reveal a character's complex personality. The language of tragedy is heightened in order to give appropriate expression to a content not normally found in everyday life.

Tragic Plot

Tragic plot A tragic plot usually starts with an initial situation in which the main characters are in harmony with their world; but then a reversal of fortune always follows. The central action is the fall of the protagonists from a condition of wealth and honour to unhappiness and death. The plot develops through the following stages:

- introduction, the presentation of the hero/ine;
- development, the hero/ine's rise to power or happiness;
- climax, the high point of the hero/ine's fortunes;
- crisis, the turning point in the hero/ine's fortunes;
- decline, deterioration in the hero/ine's situation;
- catastrophe, the hero/ine's fall, often to a condition of degradation and humiliation, and death. An essential ingredient of tragic plot is the presence of a hostile fate

The incidents of the plot are mainly unfortunate events which drag the protagonists to their fall. For example, it is an unlucky chance that Romeo gets involved in the street fight in which he kills Tybalt or that he doesn't receive Friar Laurence's message in time. The protagonist/s is/are doomed from the beginning; this is usually shown by a series of premonitions of death in the characters' speeches. The characters are not flat like the ones you often find in comedy. Although Romeo and Juliet are possessed by the unique passion of love, their individual personality shows a complexity which is more of a round character.

Tragic Hero and Heroine

In dramatic tradition, tragedy mostly revolves round one central character has identified the following features in the tragic hero or heroine of who presents a complex portrait of a human being and uses a dignified manner of speech to express human suffering. A. C. Bradley, a Shakespearean scholar, Shakespeare's plays. They can be extended to cover tragedies by other playwrights as well. The tragic hero or heroine...

- is usually a person of high rank,
- is a person of noble character and exceptional qualities but suffering from a fatal weakness,
- comes close to achieving fame, happiness and what she wishes,
- the disaster that befalls him/her is inevitable, either decreed by fate or the result of the character's fatal weakness,

- despite the inevitability of the outcome s/he does not accept his/her destruction without a struggle;
- the suffering is extreme and in strong contrast to earlier happiness or wellbeing;
- the suffering and calamity usually extend beyond the protagonist to involve other characters.

Language in Drama

There are countless ways that you can talk about how language works in a play, a production, a particular performance. Given a choice, you should probably focus on words, phrases, lines, or scenes that really struck you, things that you still remember weeks after reading the play or seeing the performance. You'll have a much easier time writing about a bit of language that you feel strongly about (love it or hate it).

That said, here are two common ways to talk about how language works in a play:

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