



Lecture 03

Drama

Drama, or play, is a piece of writing presented through performance. Playwrights—writers of plays—**performance** script their plays in either prose, verse, or both. Unlike other literary genres, drama is composed to be acted, played, and performed in front of an audience. The word drama is originally a Greek word, which means **to act** or **to do**. Literature in action (another term used to refer to drama) brings the story to life as it is based on the performances of the actors and their actions besides the written words.

Drama is considered an **economic** form of literature because words, sentences, and emotions are delivered through the actors' performance instead of written words. Due to this, drama has **no description** of detailed settings or characters' appearances like in novels and short stories. Instead, the audience is expected to deduce these aspects from decorations of the stage and the roles played by the actors. This reliance on stage makes the drama **intense**, that is limited to a specific time and place.

Note: Drama Division

While the novel is divided into parts that are called chapters, Drama has **acts** and **scenes** instead. Acts are a collection of scenes which mean that they are longer. Scenes, on the other hand, are just few minutes long where they focus on one event, action, or a dialogue of the story. A scene usually starts with the actor's entrance to the stage and ends when they leave it.

I. Characteristics of Drama

Drama as a work of literature is different from the other two literary genres in the way it connects with the audience. Drama is characterised with:

1. Absence of an Author

While in fiction the reader can extract the writer's voice in narrative, it is not the same case in drama. In some cases, few characters in a drama might have an authoritative and controlling voice which allows them to remain objective throughout the drama. Nevertheless, these characters remain mere characters

(limited) who cannot cover all the events of the story or access the other characters' inner thoughts and feelings.

2. Staging

Even though drama is based on a script (the written form of plays), it is used to contribute to the theatrical event. Scripts are only fulfilled by other aspects brought by the stage: the audience, decorations, music, and the actors' performance.

II. Historical Development of English Drama

1. Pagan Drama

From its beginnings, drama and religion have been connected. Some critics argue that drama dates back to old religious rituals and festival celebrations where stories of battles and hunting trips were retold and acted.

2. Medieval Drama

In England, drama was introduced with the arrival of the Normans. which were used **Mummer plays** to retell old folk tales such as St. George and the Dragon and Robin Hood were common in the form of street plays moving between towns. This form of plays was performed in return of money. During the 13th century, the church started using drama for **didactic** purposes resulting in two new forms of theatre:

- Mystery Drama: It appeared in the 13th century and was performed by priests and clergymen. Mystery plays were used to deliver biblical stories to illiterate people. These plays were performed at the steps of churches and then moved to small stages called pageant.
- Morality Drama: At the end of the 14th century, this new type of drama evolved. Morality drama is an **allegorical** play where actors impersonate characters like Hope, Truth, Death, Falsehood, etc. in order to teach the audience lessons in life. *Everyman* (c. 1490) is an example of a morality during the 15th century.

3. Renaissance Drama

In this period, drama became a source of entertainment to both royals and commoners instead of being limited to religious purposes.

As the Tudors aspired to catch-up with the rest of Europe, culture and arts were considered important. It was during the reign of Elizabeth I that the greatest dramatists appeared like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Johnson. Themes like inner struggles (struggles inside the character's mind), man's consciousness, and individuality were commonly discussed during this period, especially through the developing use of monologues and asides that help in accessing the characters' thoughts and feelings. Moreover, during the Renaissance period, the first English comedy play, *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall (1552-1553), and the first tragedy, *Gorboduc* by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville in 1561, were performed.

4. Restoration Drama

After the Puritan movement (a religious movement in England) and its closing down of theatres, King Charles II encouraged the re-opening of theatres which resulted in the flourishing of the dramatic field during this period. The reopening of theatres provided a new space for dramatists to delve into, especially for who **women** joined dramas as actresses for the first time. While Restoration drama is known for its comical and **satirical** themes, it also reflects on complicated and tragic stories because of the political and religious conflicts taking place during that period. Works of playwrights, such as **John Dryden** for instance, try to address the conflict between actions and emotions through narrating stories of soldiers and their deadly battles.

5. 20th Century Drama

While in the 18th and 19th centuries dramatists reproduced and retold Shakespearean dramas and Restoration plays and focused on musicals, 20th century drama addressed technological advancement, wars, and questions on humanity. Nevertheless, the largest focus is the daily life problems, whether social or political. George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter are among the main British playwrights who used **realism** in their works.

III. Types of Drama

Drama is known for its symbol of the two masks. These two masks represent the main two types of drama, the weeping mask for tragedy and the laughing mask on the other hand is for comedy.

1. Tragedy

One of the oldest forms of drama which started in Greek theatre during the 6th and 5th century B.C. Aristotle, in *Poetics* (c. 335 B.C.), identifies tragedy as a representation of serious and complete actions that create a sense of pity, sympathy, and horror in the audience.

Throughout history, the meaning of tragedy drama kept changing. In Greek culture, it was used to refer to historical dramas that narrate the downfall of a great man. However, in modern drama, tragedy is used to refer to stories that do not have a happy ending. As Aristotle's definition, tragedy drama deals with themes related to death, revenge, betrayal, and so on. In this type of drama, the tragic hero is a character with an inner weakness that allows outside forces to easily control them as with the character of Hamlet in Shakespeare's play.

2. Comedy

Any play that causes laughter among the audience is a comedy drama. Often, comedy drama deviates from the ordinary use of actions, characters, and speeches to create a humorous impact. In modern theatres, comedy drama addresses real life situations and problems from an **ironic** perspective. Unlike the tragic hero, the comic hero is simple, innocent, and with less complicated background.

3. Tragicomedy

As the name shows, this drama is a combination of the two main types: tragedy and comedy. Characters in this type of plays are exaggerated, there could be a happy ending after a fatal serious event or vice versa. Furthermore, jokes in this type of drama are relied on to lighten the seriousness of the tone. The tragicomedy drama is used to deliver a realistic image of life where both tragedy and comedy coexist.

IV. Components of Drama

1. Plot

As with the case of fiction, plot in drama is the plan the playwright uses to arrange the events of the story together and it answers the question 'what happened?' Plot is formed of five parts:

- Exposition: The first part of the story in which the playwright introduces the characters and general information about the drama.
- Rising Actions: The moment of complication that leads to the main conflict of the story.

- Climax: The highest point of tension in the story where the conflict takes place.
- Falling Actions: The end of the crisis that results from the climax part.
- Conclusion/ Resolution: The last part of the drama that provides a closure of the story and the end of the complications.

2. Characters

Characters are the ones who play a role in the drama and can be a person, animal, or object.

- Round character: The centre of the story that the playwright provides detailed description of.
- Flat character: Often more than one character. Minor characters have limited roles that work to highlight the major character's personality and leads them towards their goal.

3. Speech

- Dialogue: The uttered words and the formed conversations between two or more actors on stage. Dialogue reveals the plot and characters' personalities that need to be suitable for their roles.
- Soliloquy (Monologue): This type of speech is done by one of the characters when they are alone on stage. Soliloquy speech reveals the inner thoughts, emotions, and struggles of the character.
- Aside: Compared to soliloquy, aside is often shorter and directed towards the audience but not heard by the other characters. Asides are on other characters and reveal the character's **short commentary** thoughts and feeling in that exact moment.

4. Setting

The setting in the play is what provides information about the when and where the story is taking place.

- Time: Indicates when the story is taking place. In dramas, time is identified by the characters' costumes and the stage's lightening.
- Place: Refers to the location of the events of the story. In theatre, place is indicated by using stage decorations.

5. Theme

Like with the works of fiction (novel and short story), theme in drama is the general idea, the message, and lesson the playwright wants to deliver to and teach the audience.