

NKR GOVT ARTS COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, NAMAKKAL.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

II BA ENGLISH - III SEM

LITERARY FORMS AND CRITICISM

E. CONTENT UNIT-II

2. Tragedy and Comedy.

From the earliest times drama has been divided into two kinds 1. Tragedy and 2. Comedy. Tragedy dealing with the dark side of life and Comedy with its light side. Tragedy in Greek drama dealt with the fate of characters of high birth and station, kings, princes and their household. Comedy dealt with people of less important.

In ancient Greece the tragic actor put on a thick-soled and high-heeled boot called the buskin or Colchus, to make him appear tall and majestic; the comic actor wore a light shoe called the sock. Milton's *Il Penseroso* is a perfect example of Classical Tragedy.

In the 18th c witnessed the rise of a new type of tragedy, called the Domestic Tragedy, which attempted to use the characters and incidents of ordinary life as the subject of serious drama.

Tragic and Comic Atmosphere

The atmosphere of Tragedy is sombre and serious that of Comedy mischievous and light.

In "pure" Tragedy and "pure" Comedy, there is no element of the one mingled with the other. In English literature the two are frequently found intermingled.

Both Comedy and Tragedy aim at giving pleasure. This is obvious enough as regards Comedy. Tragedy does afford pleasure, but of a lofty order.

The language and artistry of the presentation rise to match the high passions and issues of the story, carries the audiences to a level far above the petty interests and troubles of its everyday life.

Tragedy and Comedy served two distinct purposes. The purpose of Tragedy was to effect a Catharsis or a purgation of the emotions, that of Comedy was to correct manners.

Types of Tragedy

Tragedy has assumed only two forms:

Classical and Romantic. The main features of the classical type, are Three Unities and the employment of the device of the Chorus.

The Romantic tragedy is built on a different plan. It is not circumscribed by the Three Unities. It does not employ the chorus.

It is written not to a set pattern but in whatever form the writer finds best suited to his dramatic purpose.

Horror Tragedy.

It specialising in scenes of violence and cruelty example the works of Webster and Ford.

Heroic Tragedy.

It deals with the exploits of a sublime hero and sometimes in rhyme.

Domestic Tragedy: aiming at the portrayal of middle class life.

Types of Comedy:

Comedy may be classical and Romantic. In the classical form was attempted by Ben Johnson and the Restoration playwrights.

The Romantic Comedy by Shakespeare and the 'University wits'. Comedy also classified as follows. 1. The humour Comedy, (ii) Comedy of Manners (iii) General Comedy (iv) Sentimental Comedy etc.

2. Tragic-Comedy

Tragic-Comedy is half Tragedy and half Comedy, mingled harmoniously together. It contains comic relief and has a potentially tragic background. The comic relief in a tragedy serves only to intensify the tragic effect by contrast, and does not materially affect the tone of the play. Example, The function of the Porter in Macbeth.

Origin and History

Plautus, the Latin Comic dramatist, attempted of the sort in his Amphitruo, which he called a "tragic-comoedia".

Tragic-Comic element was indispensable to the Sentimental Comedy of the 18th c and the serious play of modern times.

Arguments For and Against the Form

Sidney states that Tragic-Comedy as 'the mongrel'. Milton condemned it in the preface to Samson Agonistes.

Addison, Dryden, Dr Johnson and Alazdyce Nicoll are supports and appreciate the formation of Tragic-Comedy.

3. One Act play

The One-Act play dates far back to the early Mystery and miracle play. It is quite brief at first.

At a later period the standard programme at a London theatre consisted of full-length play preceded by a One-act piece, called a "Curtain raiser".

Technique

The One-Act play is not a full-length play in miniature. It is a form by itself imposes severe restriction on the playwright.

The writer must present the people and the story with a few suggestive strokes. and his dialogue must be careful.

③.

Brevity is the soul of the One-Act play. The One-Act play approaches the classical conception of the dramatic art. It has a single main episode and is either a pure comedy or a pure tragedy. It is confined to a single place. Example, Yeats's *Land of Heart's Desire* or *Cathleen in Houlihan*.

Simplicity of design and immediate impact are the qualities on which it depends for its success.

④. The Masque.

The Masque was a medley of music, elaborate scenic effects, and dancing, woven around a fairy tale, myth or allegory. It was of Italian origin, and was introduced into England in the 16th c.

The earliest account of an English Masque occurs in Hall's Chronicle for the year 1512.

The features of an early Masque clearly set forth makes elaborate costumes, and dancing.

Its main features summarised as follows.

- ①. The characters are deities of classical mythology, nymphs, Love, Delight etc.
- ②. The number of characters is restricted to six.
- ③. The scene are laid in ideal regions, such as Olympus Arcadia, the Fortunate Isles.
- ④. Dances of various kinds are introduced at appropriate places.

- ⑥
- ②. The scenery and costumes are very elaborate.
 - ③. Frequently a comic interlude is introduced, called the Anti-masque, forming a humorous counterpoint to the main plot.
 - ④. The masque is about as long as a single Act of one of Shakespeare's plays.

The Masque was a costly form of entertainment designed either for presentation at court or to grace a festive occasion at a nobleman's house. Example, ~~Ferdinand and Miranda~~, 'The Marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda' in Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

⑥. Farce and Melodrama

Farce is an exaggerated form of comedy. Its aim is to provoke hearty laughter. It is a lively caricature not a representation of things. The characters are free from everyday cares and restraints.

It is a Latin word which means 'to stuff'. As a separate form of entertainment it came into vogue towards the close of the 17th c.

Melodrama was a debased form of tragedy. Originally a prominent place in it was assigned to song which is the meaning of the word 'melodrama' but now the term is reserved for a play of crudely sensational type.

It came into prominence in the 18th c. Its characters are mere puppets in an extravagant story of crime, revenge

and so on. Examples. Lope's Spanish Tragedy and Webster's Duchess of Malfi.

⑥ Absurd Drama.

The theatre of the Absurd is a post World War II designation for particular plays of absurdist fiction written by a number of European playwrights in the late 1950s.

The plays focus largely on ideas of Existentialism and express what happens when human existence lacks meaning or purpose. The structure of the play is typically a round shape, with the finishing point the same as the starting point.

Martin Esslin coined the term in his 1960 essay "The Theatre of the Absurd". Esslin defines with a quotation from Ionesco: "absurd is that which has no purpose, no goal, or objective".

The French philosopher Albert Camus, in his 1942 essay "Myth of Sisyphus", describes the human situation as meaningless and absurd.

Notable writers in this genre are Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet. Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, and