

## CHAPTET FOUR

### Drama

#### 4.1The Concept of Drama

Literature, in a broad sense, means compositions that tell stories, dramatize situations, express emotion, and analyze ideas. Since drama or play meets those characteristics perfectly, it becomes one of the literary genres which are very popular among readers. In fact, drama is literature designed for stage or film presentation by people- actors- for the benefit & delights of other people- an audience and in this regard, unlike Fiction, the essence of drama is the development of character and situation through speech & action. In line with that, according to Reaske, **drama is a work of literature or a composition which describes life and human activity by means of presenting various actions of- and dialogues between- a group of characters.** Drama is furthermore designed for theatrical presentation; that is, although we speak of drama as a literary work or a composition, we must never forget that drama is designed to be acted on the stage. Thus, when we read a play, we have no real grasp of what that play is like unless we at least attempt to imagine how actors on a stage would present the material.

Drama comes from Greek words meaning "to do" or "to act." A play is a story acted out. It shows people going through some eventful period in their lives, seriously or humorously. The speech and action of a play recreate the flow of human life. A play comes fully to life only on the stage. On the stage it combines many arts those of the author, director, actor, designer, and others. Dramatic performance involves an intricate process of rehearsal based upon imagery inherent in the dramatic text. A playwright first invents a drama out of mental imagery. The dramatic text presents the drama as a range of verbal imagery. The language of drama can range between great extremes: on the one hand, an intensely theatrical and ritualistic manner; and on the other, an almost exact reproduction of real life.

**Here are some definitions of Drama from different sources:**

"... something intended specifically for performance on stage in front of an audience."

"... A composition in prose or verse adapted to be acted upon a stage in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action, and is represented with accompanying gesture, costume, and scenery as in real life."

"... A story without a story-teller; in it characters act out directly what Aristotle called an "imitation" of such actions as we find in life." Scholes and Kellog.

"... A lively image of human nature; representing its passions and humors and changes in fortune to which it is subjected for delight and instruction of mankind." John Dryden.

These definitions point to the fact that drama is written **to be seen** rather than read and its meaning can only be fully appreciated when **actually seen in performance**. It is a mode of literature meant for theatre in which actors are represented and impersonate the characters and actions and also involves dialogue. Action or performance plays central roles in drama. It is an artistic form that combines actions and dialogue and meant for

staging. This makes it a much more 'public' form than prose or poetry in that the experience of the play in performance is a shared experience. This essential aspect of drama is easy to lose sight of when sitting in a classroom, or on our own, grappling with the language of a drama text. Plays are written to be performed by actors on a stage before an audience. Playwrights create plays having actors, producers, directors, costumers, designers, technicians, and a theatre full of other support staffs that have a hand in presenting the play to a live audience, besides readers.

A **drama**, which is written to be performed by actors in front of the audience, is a story told mainly through the speech and actions of characters. Whereas drama includes many of the same elements as other narratives, it also has its own unique elements. In order to analyze works of drama, we need to examine all these elements. Because drama is meant to be performed, actors, directors and readers need to be able to visualize what is happening in the play. Consequently, playwrights include **stage directions** interspersed among the lines of the script. Stage directions are typically printed in italics and enclosed in brackets or parentheses to stand out clearly from the dialogue. The directions explain how characters should look, speak, move, and behave. They also might specify details of the setting and scenery, such as lightning, props, and sound effects.

### **What makes a Drama a Drama?**

- \* A dramatist should start with characters. The characters must be full, rich, interesting, and different enough from each other so that in one way or another they conflict. From this conflict comes the story
- \* Put the characters into dramatic situations with strongly plotted conclusions
- \* The plot should be able to tell what happens and why
- \* The beginning, should tell the audience or reader what took place before the story leads into the present action. The middle carries the action forward, amid trouble and complications. In the end, the conflict is resolved, and the story comes to a satisfactory, but not necessarily a happy conclusion.
- \* It should be filled with characters whom real people admire and envy. The plots must be filled with action. It should penetrate both the heart and mind and shows man as he is, in all his misery and glory.

## 4.2. A Brief History of Drama

Before turning our attention to particular aspects of drama, as well as to particular plays, it seems worthwhile to survey briefly the development of drama as a generic form. That is, when we speak of drama as a genre we must be aware of the different forms that genre has adopted over several thousand years. Let us explore briefly some of the ways in which dramatists have used the form for capturing moments of life.

### 1. The Beginnings

Performative elements (including dramatic and theatrical) are present in every society, no matter how complex or how sophisticated the culture may be. These elements are evident in our political campaigns holiday celebrations, sport events, religious ceremonies, and children's make-believe, just as they are in the dances and rituals of primitive peoples. Although there is evidence of types of ritual and performance existing in different societies for thousands of years, drama as it is known in the west—that is, as acted to an audience and involving dialogue between characters—first appeared in Ancient Greece and reached its peak in the fifth century BC, when tragedies (meaning 'goat-song' from the Greek *tragos*, 'goat' probably because goats were sacrificed) were performed at the Dionysia, a dramatic festival held in Athens every April in honor of the Greek God of wine and song, Dionysus. These tragedies had a huge influence on Elizabethan drama and the plays are still performed today.

This drama probably developed from songs and rituals performed by a 'chorus' of fifty Athenian men in honour of Dionysus. The grand job of having invented drama is given to a character called Thespis, who was apparently the first member of the chorus to step out and then address them in the character of a god, thus creating dialogue. That is why actors even today are known as 'Thespians'. This early drama was probably fairly crude, but by the time of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the three great Athenian dramatists, tragedy was a popular, sophisticated and well-funded enterprise, and preparations for the Dionysia began months in advance. There was even what we would call a modern day 'producer', the choragus, whose job was to raise funds for the plays to be performed at the Dionysia, and they even had a form of special effects, the *deus ex machine* – a crane that allowed the gods to 'fly'!

Each playwright had to submit four plays: a trilogy of tragedies and then what was known as a satyr play (a satyr being half-goat, half-man), which was a hybrid of comedy and tragedy and dealt with similar themes to the three tragedies. For their subject matter, the playwrights always chose common myths, which the audiences would know. That being the case, the elements of surprise was lost, but instead greater emphasis was placed on the dramatist's treatment of the myth. The two most famous existing trilogies are Aeschylus' **Oresteia**, telling of the myth of Orestes, and Sophocles' so-called **Theban trilogy**, telling the story of Oedipus and his daughter Antigone. The tragedies generally portray humans at being at the mercy of gods who are at best thoughtless and at worst malicious, and subject

to a fate which can often be cruel. The protagonists (main characters) of these plays often find themselves in situations, which they have, no control, or impossible dilemmas, which ultimately lead to their death. Perhaps the most famous example of this 'malign fate' is Sophocles' story of Oedipus. A summary of the story and then an extract from the play follows (Griffiths 2001:21-3).

In the beginning drama commenced with religious celebration. Out of the various rites and festivals arose the earliest dramas of an entertaining kind, specifically Greek Tragedy and Greek Comedy.

#### a. Greek Tragedy

Greek Tragedy addresses itself to serious dimension of life and human character. The character in it is led into death, despair, or misery through some sort of **error**, either in himself or in his action. **Its basic idea is man learns through suffering.** Tragedy should have a **purging** effect: ***the audience should be purged of both pity and fear by the time a tragedy comes to and end.*** This then is Greek Tragedy as explained by Aristotle. We still speak of the classical unities of time, place, and action which tragedies should have, and we still refer to almost all of Aristotle's theories.

#### b. Greek Comedy

It was developed out of early religious celebration. It deals with a great deal of boisterous (active) comment on affairs of state through political satire (old comedy) and it also deals with romantic situations (new comedy), and we generally witness potential lovers working from unhappy problematic situations into happy, comfortable ones. Then, as now comedies illustrated the traditional happy ending.

### 2. Drama in the Middle Age

In the late ninth and tenth centuries, there were musical presentations of certain church services, particularly the various masses. From these musical presentations came drama as the priests began to speak rather than sing the story. Eventually these musical presentations became independent of the church liturgy and medieval drama was established as a secular entertainment although religious subjects were still by far the most popular. Gradually the presentations were moved from the church to outdoors, particularly into open courtyards. **The story of man and the life of Christ became the main subjects of all medieval drama.**

### 3. Morality Plays and Interludes

This emerged at the beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> century. Here, certain passions, vices, and virtues were represented on the stage by actors in funny costumes. The audience could watch the characters such as death, evil, mercy, shame, holiness, which are considered abstract.

The morality plays led slowly into the creation of interludes, which were relatively short plays brief enough to be presented by only two actors. It's not always serious & religious any more. Thus the interlude is often considered to be one of the major secularizing influences on drama.

### 4. Elizabethan (Renaissance )Drama

By the late of 16<sup>th</sup> century, it became the best time in the history of literature. There were various themes and various kinds of drama at that time. This was also the beginning of new kinds of play: the romantic comedies, the revenge-murder drama, the court comedies, the pastoral plays as well as secular drama, many of which survive to the present day.

#### **5. Restoration & 18<sup>th</sup> Century Drama**

In this period of time, heroic plays became extremely popular. It is a kind of tragedy or tragic comedy. The heroes were usually great military leaders, great lovers experiencing a conflict between their love and their patriotism.

#### **6. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Drama**

It is like the Elizabethan Drama: there were many varieties of plays. There was a strong interest in more serious plays although comedy also emerged. The heroic plays slowly led into the more extreme spectacle and excessive emotionalism of melodrama.

#### **7. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Drama**

Theatre became vastly popular, and there are many rebellious dramas. It used to be believed that a real tragedy must follow the Aristotelian Principle that a noble hero suffers a calamitous (dreadful) fall. Now, it's not completely followed.