

**Course name: Introduction to Verse and Drama**

**Course code:** EnLa2064

*The reading material is prepared for 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate DELL Students/ University of Gondar for the course 'Introduction to verse and drama'. It has two major sections. the first one deals on poetry and the second on drama. Sample analyses are given in each of the sections.*

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# Section one: Poetry

## What is Poetry?

To ask ‘What is poetry?’ is very much like asking ‘What is literature?’ and in fact the answers to both these questions overlap: Poetry is perceived as fictional, it uses specialised language, in many cases it lacks a pragmatic function, it is also ambiguous (see Basic Concepts ch. 1.2).

### The Definition of Poetry

- The kind of thing poets write (Robert Frost)
- The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings (William Wordsworth)
- The recollection of an emotion, which causes a new emotion (William Wordsworth)
- Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude (John Stuart Mill)
- When we read a poem something happens within us. They bring to life a group of images, feelings, and thoughts (Stageberg & Anderson)
- Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things (Mathew Arnold)
- Poetry teaches the enormous forces of a few words (R.W. Emerson)
- Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to help reason (Samuel Johnson)

### Outward Indications

In addition, there are a number of outward signs that indicate a poem: Most obviously, the individual text lines in poetry do not fill the entire width of the page. Thus, before they have actually started reading, readers of poetry are given an instant indication that what they are going to read is probably a poem. In consequence, a reader’s attention is likely to focus on ‘poetic features’ of the text.

Poetry is often associated not only with specialised language but with a very dense use of such specialised language. Poems usually try to express their meaning in much less space than, say, a novel or even a short story. Alexander Pope once explained that he preferred to write poetry even when he wrote about philosophy because it enabled him to express himself more briefly (**Pope, Preface to An Essay on Man, 1734**). As a result of its relative brevity, poetry tends to make more concentrated use of formal elements, it displays a tendency for

structural, phonological, morphological and syntactic overstructuring, a concept which originated in formalist and structuralist criticism. It means that poetry uses elements such as sound patterns, verse and metre, rhetorical devices, style, stanza form or imagery more frequently than other types of text. Obviously, not all poems use all these elements and not all verse is poetry, as John Hollander remarks (Hollander 2001: 1). Especially modern poets deliberately flaunt reader expectations about poetic language (see the ‘found poem’ in ch. 1.2.). Nonetheless, most poetry depends on the aesthetic effects of a formalised use of language.

Some people associate poetry with subjectivity and the expression of intense personal experience. While this is true for some poetry, especially lyrical poetry, there are a great number of poems this does not apply to; for example narrative poems like Scott’s *Marmion* or didactic and philosophical poems like Pope’s *Essay on Man* or John Philips’ *Cyder*. Just as it is often misleading to identify the author of a novel with its narrator, one should not assume that the author of a poem is identical with its speaker and thus even lyrical poems cannot be treated as subjective expressions of the author. The two levels of author and speaker should always be kept separate. The communication situation in poetry is very similar to the one in prose, except that poetry very often does not include dialogue, thus the inner box is optional:

Searching for a definition of poetry, other readers look for ‘universal truth’ or some other deeper meaning in poetry more than in prose, the famous nineteenth-century critic Matthew Arnold for instance (see Arnold 1880).

Again, while some poetry might very well deal with universal truths, this is probably not the case for all. There is no doubt some poetry which is very lovely and very popular but which, at bottom, is really neither very profound nor the expression of a universal truth. Take these lines by Ben Jonson for instance, one of the most popular love songs in the last 400 years:

### **To Celia**

Drink to me only with thine eyes  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,  
And I’ll not look for wine.  
The thirst that from the soul doth rise,  
Doth ask a drink divine:  
But might I of Jove’s nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.  
[...]

In fact, to expect statements of universal truth from poetry can be rather misleading if one deduces from this that what matters in a poem is somehow what lies behind the language and its use (for this problem see the discussion in Warren/Brooks 1960: 6-20), whereas modern criticism insists that form cannot be separated from meaning (See also Theme ch. 1.5.).

It is difficult to answer the question ‘What is Poetry?’ conclusively, though most people are more or less able to recognise poetry when they see it.

One recent critic has suggested the following criteria in answer to the question

‘What is Poetry?’ (Müller-Zettelmann 2000: 73-156):

Poetic texts have a tendency to

- relative brevity (with some notable exceptions)
- dense expression
- express subjectivity more than other texts
- display a musical or songlike quality
- be structurally and phonologically overstructured
- be syntactically and morphologically overstructured
- deviate from everyday language
- aesthetic self-referentiality (which means that they draw attention to themselves as art form both through the form in which they are written and through explicit references to the writing of poetry)

With all the difficulties of defining poetry it is worth remembering that poetry, especially in the form of song, is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression, much older than prose, and that it seems to answer – or to originate in – a human impulse that reaches for expression in joy, grief, doubt, hope, loneliness, and much more.

## **2Types of Poetry**

When studying poetry, it is useful first of all to consider the theme and the overall development of the theme in the poem. Obviously, the sort of development that takes place depends to a considerable extent on the type of poem one is dealing with. It is useful to keep two general distinctions in mind (for more detailed definitions consult Abrams 1999 and Preminger et al 1993): lyric poetry and narrative poetry.

### **2.1. Lyric Poetry**

A lyric poem is a comparatively short, non-narrative poem in which a single speaker presents a state of mind or an emotional state. Lyric poetry retains some of the elements of song which is said to be its origin: For Greek writers the lyric was a song accompanied by the lyre.

Subcategories of the lyric are, for example elegy, ode, sonnet and dramatic monologue and most occasional poetry:

In modern usage, **Elegy** is a formal lament for the death of a particular person (for example Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.*). More broadly defined, the term elegy is also used for solemn meditations often on questions of death, such as Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

An elegy is a mournful, melancholy or plaintive poem, especially a lament for the dead or a funeral song. The term "elegy," which originally denoted a type of poetic meter (elegiac meter), commonly describes a poem of mourning. An elegy may also reflect something that seems to the author to be strange or mysterious. The elegy, as a reflection on a death, on a sorrow more generally, or on something mysterious, may be classified as a form of lyric poetry. In a related sense that harks back to ancient poetic traditions of sung poetry, the word "elegy" may also denote a type of musical work, usually of a sad or somber nature.

An **ode** is a long lyric poem with a serious subject written in an elevated style. Famous examples are Wordsworth's **Hymn to Duty** or Keats' **Ode to a Grecian Urn**.

The **sonnet** was originally a love poem which dealt with the lover's sufferings and hopes. It originated in Italy and became popular in England in the Renaissance, when Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey translated and imitated the **sonnets** written by Petrarch (**Petrarchan sonnet**). From the seventeenth century onwards the sonnet was also used for other topics than love, for instance for religious experience (by Donne and Milton), reflections on art (by Keats or Shelley) or even the war experience (by Brooke or Owen). The sonnet uses a single stanza of (usually) fourteen lines and an intricate rhyme pattern (see stanza forms ch. 4.5.). Many poets wrote a series of sonnets linked by the same theme, so-called sonnet cycles (for instance Petrarch, Spenser, Shakespeare, Drayton, Barrett-Browning, Meredith) which depict the various stages of a love relationship.

In a **dramatic monologue** a speaker, who is explicitly someone other than the author, makes a speech to a silent auditor in a specific situation and at a critical moment. Without intending to do so, the speaker reveals aspects of his temperament and character. In Browning's *My Last Duchess* for instance, the Duke shows the picture of his last wife to the emissary from his prospective new wife and reveals his excessive pride in his position and his jealous temperament.

**Occasional poetry** is written for a specific occasion: a wedding (then it is called an epithalamion, for instance Spenser's Epithalamion), the return of a king from exile (for instance Dryden's Annus Mirabilis) or a death (for example Milton's Lycidas), etc.

Below is an **example of an elegy** (one form of lyric poetry) with some analysis of it.

## **ELEGY FOR A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE**

by: Nazik al-Malaikah

When she died no face turned pale, no lips trembled  
Doors heard no retelling of her death  
No curtains opened to air the room of grief  
No eyes followed the coffin to the end of the road  
Only, hovering in the memory, a vague form  
Passing in the lane

The scrap of news stumbled in the alleyways  
Its whisper, finding no shelter,  
Lodged obscurely in an unseen corner.  
The moon murmured sadly.

Night, unconcerned, gave way to morning  
Light came with the milk cart and the call to fasting  
With the hungry mewling of a cat of rags and bones  
She shrill cries of vendors in the bitter streets  
The squabbling of small boys throwing stones  
Dirty water spilling along the gutters  
Smells on the wind  
Which played about the rooftops  
Playing in deep forgetfulness  
Playing alone

## **An Analysis of the above poem**

"An Elegy for a Woman of No Importance" written by al Mala'ikah, is a poem that expresses sorrow for woman who leads a lonely life and has a lonely death. Although most elegies are usually about famous people, the author of this poem dealt with women who are obscure or little known. I also found with reading this poem many more times, and recognizing that the woman's name is never given, that it is about many women who are Muslim and go unnoticed.

One main strategy that the author uses express her point is personification. An example of this is, "Night, unconcerned gave way to morning." This stanza is used to emphasize that after she died, another ordinary

day came because to everyone else, her death practically didn't even happen.

The mood to the poem is immediately depressing and sad, probably because it deals with death. Then as you read further the descriptions create the reality that no one cares about the death of this woman, which is probably what generally happens with most women in Israel. The author creates the image of life moving on without interruption because of this death. This made me feel sad for a person whose death goes unnoticed because it leads me to think that they had a lonely and quiet life, and that no one cared for them.

The poem has meaning that is broader than the reader would think the first time they read it. After reading it many more times you come to understand what the poem is about and you can imagine the life of this/these people.

### "I'm nobody! Who are you?" by Emily Dickinson another example of lyric poem

I'm nobody! Who are you?  
Are you nobody, too?  
Then there's a pair of us--don't tell!  
They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!  
How public, like a frog  
To tell your name the livelong day  
To an admiring bog!

## 2.2. Narrative Poetry

Narrative poetry gives a verbal representation, in verse, of a sequence of connected events, it propels characters through a plot. It is always told by a narrator (see narrator in narrative prose). Narrative poems might tell of a love story (like Tennyson's *Maud*), the story of a father and son (like Wordsworth's *Michael*) or the deeds of a hero or heroine (like Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*).

Sub-categories of narrative poetry are for example: epic, mock-epic or ballad.

**Epics** usually operate on a large scale, both in length and topic, such as the founding of a nation (Virgil's *Aeneid*) or the beginning of world history (Milton's *Paradise Lost*), they tend to use an elevated style of language and supernatural beings take part in the action.

**Epic poetry** is a genre of poetry, and a major form of narrative literature. It recounts, in a continuous narrative, the life and works of a heroic or mythological person or group of persons. Examples of epic poems are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the *Nibelungenlied*, *Luis*

de Camões' *Os Lusíadas*, the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Mahabharata*, Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, Nizami (or Nezami)'s *Khamse* (Five Books), and the *Epic of King Gesar*

The **mock-epic** makes use of epic conventions, like the elevated style and the assumption that the topic is of great importance, to deal with completely insignificant occurrences. A famous example is Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, which tells the story of a young beauty whose suitor secretly cuts off a lock of her hair.

A **ballad** is a song, originally transmitted orally, which tells a story. It is an important form of folk poetry which was adapted for literary uses from the sixteenth century onwards. The ballad stanza is usually a four-line stanza, alternating tetrameter and trimeter.

### **2.3. Descriptive and Didactic Poetry**

Both lyric and narrative poetry can contain lengthy and detailed descriptions (descriptive poetry) or scenes in direct speech (dramatic poetry).

The purpose of a didactic poem is primarily to teach something. This can take the form of very specific instructions, such as how to catch a fish, as in James Thomson's *The Seasons* (Spring 379-442) or how to write good poetry as in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*. But it can also be meant as instructive in a general way. Until the twentieth century all literature was expected to have a didactic purpose in a general sense, that is, to impart moral, theoretical or even practical knowledge; Horace famously demanded that poetry should combine *prodesse* (learning) and *delectare* (pleasure). The twentieth century was more reluctant to proclaim literature openly as a teaching tool.

## ***Elements of Poetry***

### **Prosody**

Prosody is the study of the meter, rhythm, and intonation of a poem. Rhythm and meter, although closely related, should be distinguished. Meter is the definitive pattern established for a verse (such as iambic pentameter), while rhythm is the actual sound that results from a line of poetry. Thus, the meter of a line may be described as being "iambic", but a full description of the rhythm would require noting where the language causes one to pause or accelerate and how the meter interacts with other elements of the language. Prosody also may be used more specifically to refer to the scanning of poetic lines to show meter.



## Rhythm

The methods for creating poetic rhythm vary across languages and between poetic traditions. Languages are often described as having timing set primarily by accents, syllables, or moras, depending on how rhythm is established, though a language can be influenced by multiple approaches.

Metrical rhythm generally involves precise arrangements of stresses or syllables into repeated patterns called feet within a line. In Modern English verse the pattern of stresses primarily differentiate feet, so rhythm based on meter in Modern English is most often founded on the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables (alone or elided). In the classical languages, on the other hand, while the metrical units are similar, vowel length rather than stresses define the meter. Old English poetry used a metrical pattern involving varied numbers of syllables but a fixed number of strong stresses in each line.

The formal patterns of meter used in Modern English verse to create rhythm no longer dominate contemporary English poetry. In the case of free verse, rhythm is often organized based on looser units of cadence rather than a regular meter. Robinson Jeffers, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams are three notable poets who reject the idea that regular accentual meter is critical to English poetry.<sup>[33]</sup> Jeffers experimented with sprung rhythm as an alternative to accentual rhythm.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Meter

In the Western poetic tradition, meters are customarily grouped according to a characteristic metrical foot and the number of feet per line. Thus, "iambic pentameter" is a meter comprising five feet per line, in which the predominant kind of foot is the "iamb." Similarly, "dactylic hexameter," comprises six feet per line, of which the dominant kind of foot is the "dactyl." Dactylic hexameter was the traditional meter of Greek epic poetry, the earliest extant examples of which are the works of Homer and Hesiod. More recently, iambic pentameter and dactylic hexameter have been used by William Shakespeare and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, respectively.

Meter is often scanned based on the arrangement of "poetic feet" into lines. In English, each foot usually includes one syllable with a stress and one or two without a stress.

As an example of how a line of meter is defined, in English-language iambic pentameter, each line has five metrical feet, and each foot is an iamb, or an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. When a particular line is scanned, there may be variations upon the basic pattern of the meter; for example, the first foot of English iambic pentameters is quite often

inverted, meaning that the stress falls on the first syllable. The generally accepted names for some of the most commonly used kinds of feet include:

A Holiday illustration to Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark", which is written mainly in anapestic tetrameter. "In the midst of the word he was trying to say / In the midst of his laughter and glee / He had softly and suddenly vanished away / For the snark was a boojum, you see."

- iamb – one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable
- trochee – one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable
- dactyl – one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables
- anapest – two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable
- spondee – two stressed syllables together
- pyrrhic – two unstressed syllables together (rare, usually used to end dactylic hexameter)

The number of metrical feet in a line are described in Greek terminology as follows:

- dimeter – two feet
- trimeter – three feet
- tetrameter – four feet
- pentameter – five feet
- hexameter – six feet
- heptameter – seven feet
- octameter – eight feet

Each of these types of feet has a certain "feel," whether alone or in combination with other feet. The iamb, for example, is the most natural form of rhythm in the English language, and generally produces a subtle but stable verse. The dactyl, on the other hand, almost gallops along. And, in the manner of *The Night Before Christmas* or Dr. Seuss, the anapest is said to produce a light-hearted, comic feel.

## **Metrical patterns**

Different traditions and genres of poetry tend to use different meters, ranging from the Shakespearian iambic pentameter and the Homeric dactylic hexameter to the Anapestic tetrameter used in many nursery rhymes. However, a number of variations to the established meter are common, both to provide emphasis or attention to a given foot or line and to avoid boring repetition. For example, the stress in a foot may be inverted, a caesura (or pause) may be added (sometimes in place of a foot or stress), or the final foot in a line may be given a feminine ending to soften it or be replaced by a spondee to emphasize it and create a hard stop. Some

patterns (such as iambic pentameter) tend to be fairly regular, while other patterns, such as dactylic hexameter, tend to be highly irregular. Regularity can vary between language.

Rhyme, alliteration, assonance and consonance are ways of creating repetitive patterns of sound. They may be used as an independent structural element in a poem, to reinforce rhythmic patterns, or as an ornamental element.

**Rhyme** consists of identical ("hard-rhyme") or similar ("soft-rhyme") sounds placed at the ends of lines or at predictable locations within lines ("internal rhyme.")

**Alliteration and assonance** ... Assonance, where the use of similar vowel sounds within a word rather than similar sounds at the beginning or end of a word, was widely used in skaldic poetry, but goes back to the Homeric epic.

In 'A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry' (Longmans, 1969) Geoffrey Leech identified six different types of sound patterns or rhyme forms. These are defined as six possible ways in which either one or two of the structural parts of the related words can vary. The unvarying parts are in upper case/bold. C symbolises a consonant cluster, not a single consonant, V a vowel.

Type	Pattern	Example 1	Example 2
Alliteration	<b>C</b> v c	great/grow	send/sit
Assonance	c <b>V</b> c	great/fail	send/bell
Consonance	c v <b>C</b>	great/meat	send/hand
Reverse Rhyme	<b>C</b> V c	great/grazed	send/sell
Pararhyme	<b>C</b> v <b>C</b>	great/groat	send/sound
Rhyme	c <b>V</b> <b>C</b>	great/bait	send/bend

### Rhyming schemes

In many languages, including modern European languages and Arabic, poets use rhyme in set patterns as a structural element for specific poetic forms, such as ballads, sonnets and rhyming couplets.

Most rhyme schemes are described using letters that correspond to sets of rhymes, so if the first, second and fourth lines of a quatrain rhyme with each other and the third line does not rhyme,

the quatrain is said to have an "a-a-b-a" rhyme scheme. This rhyme scheme is the one used, for example, in the rubaiyat form. Similarly, an "a-b-b-a" quatrain (what is known as "enclosed rhyme") is used in such forms as the Petrarchan sonnet. Some types of more complicated rhyming schemes have developed names of their own, separate from the "a-b-c" convention, such as the ottava rima and terza rima. The types and use of differing rhyming schemes is discussed further in the main article.

### ***Ottava rima***

Ottava rima is a rhyming scheme using a stanza of eight lines with an alternating a-b rhyming scheme for the first six lines followed by a closing couplet. First used by Boccaccio, it was developed for heroic epics but has also been used for mock-heroic poetry.

### ***Terza rima***

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is written in terza rima, where each stanza has three lines, with the first and third rhyming, and the second line rhyming with the first and third lines of the next stanza (thus, a-b-a / b-c-b / c-d-c, et cetera.) in a chain rhyme. The terza rima provides a flowing, progressive sense to the poem, and used skilfully it can evoke a sense of motion, both forward and backward. Terza rima is appropriately used in lengthy poems in languages with rich rhyming structures (such as Italian, with its many common word endings).

## **Poetry Analysis**

### **Where do we start?**

- To really understand a poem you need to read it 3 times.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> to just read it through
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> to analyze structure (rhyme scheme, meter, figurative language, etc.)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> to analyze meaning
- Let's start with an easy one

### **Reading 1**

- Just read the poem and absorb the language. Enjoy the imagery and the rhythm of the words.

Close your eye if you want to—I'll read it to you

## “Music”

by Percy Bysshe Shelly

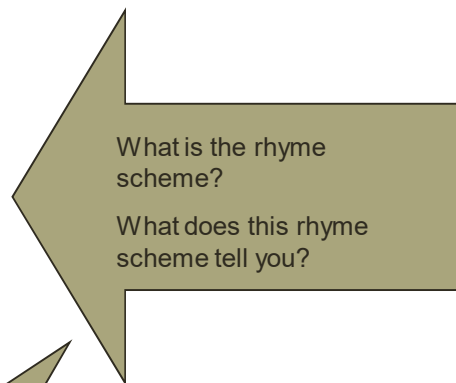
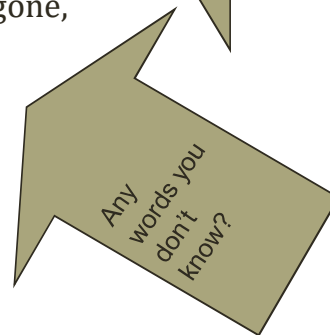
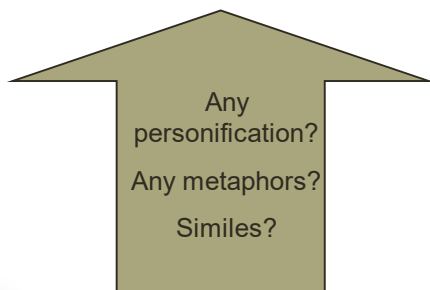
Music, when soft voices die,  
Vibrates in the memory;  
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,  
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,  
Are heap'd for the beloved's bed;  
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,  
Love itself shall slumber on.

## Reading 2

- Now let's look at the form of this poem

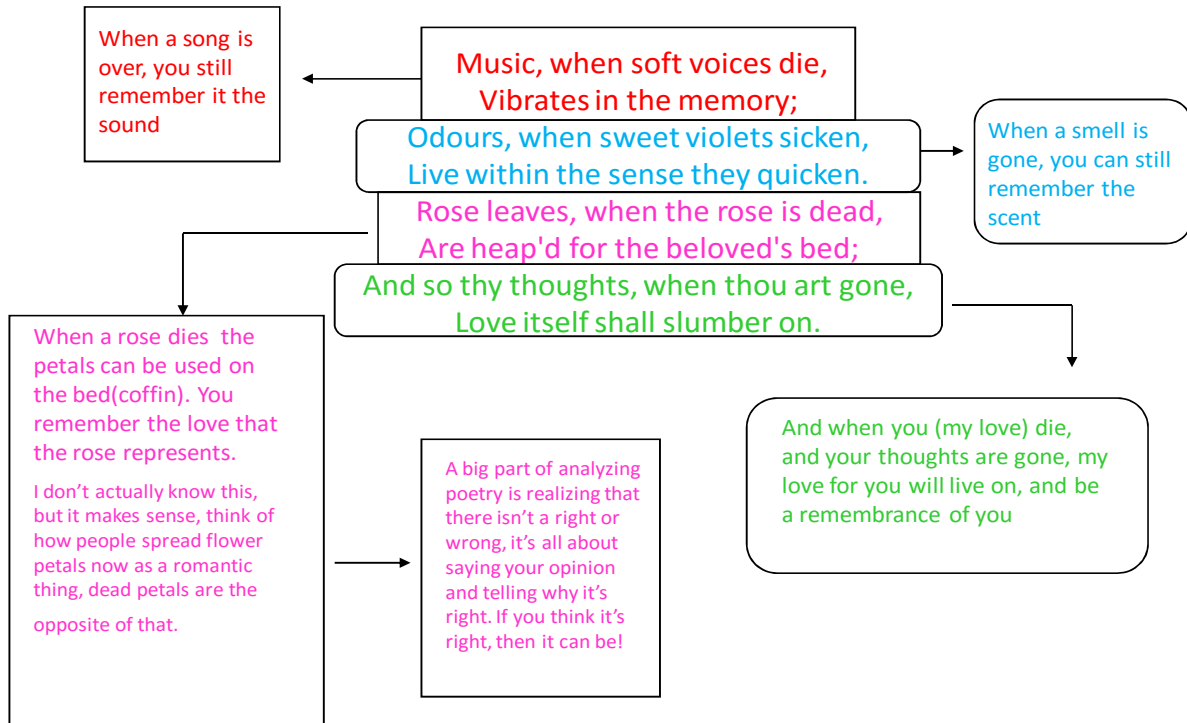
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Love itself shall slumber on.



## Reading 3

- What kinds of questions do I ask?
  - Remember, everything in poetry is done for a purpose, so you have to be constantly asking “WHY?” and “WHAT?”
    - Why did he say this?
    - What is this supposed to mean?
    - What does this represent?
    - What is the overall point?

## Reading 3



## Analysing “Daffodils” .. a poem by William Wordsworth

- Written in 1804
- First published in 1807 in Poems in Two Volumes revised version in 1815
- Inspired by the moment when William Wordsworth was strolling along Glencoyne Bay, Ullswater in the Lake District with his sister, Dorothy in April 15, 1802

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host, of golden daffodils;

Beside the lake, beneath the trees,

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

v / v / v / v /

I wan/dered lone/ly as/ a cloud

v / v / v / v /

That floats/ on high/ o'er vales/ and hills,

v / v / v / v /

When all/ at once/ I saw/ a crowd,

v / v / v / v /

A host/, of gol/den da/ffodils;

v / v / v / v /

Beside/ the lake/, beneath/ the trees,

v / v / v / v /

Fluttering/ and dan/cing in/ the breeze.

Four six-lines stanzas

- Iambic tetrameter
- ABABCC rhyme scheme

# Section Two: Drama

## What is Drama

Drama as a literary genre is realized in performance, which is why Robert Di Yanni (quoted in Dukore) describes it as “staged art” (867). As a literary form, it is designed for the theatre because characters are assigned roles and they act out their roles as the action is enacted on stage. These characters can be human beings, dead or spiritual beings, animals, or abstract qualities. Drama is an adaptation, recreation and reflection of reality on stage. Generally, the word, dramatist is used for any artist who is involved in any dramatic composition either in writing or in performance.

Drama is different from other genres of literature. It has unique characteristics that have come about in response to its peculiar nature. Really, it is difficult to separate drama from performance because during the stage performance of a play, drama brings life experiences realistically to the audience. It is the most concrete of all genres of literature. When you are reading a novel, you read a story as told by the novelist. The poem’s message in most cases is not direct because it is presented in a compact form or in a condensed language. The playwright does not tell the story instead you get the story as the characters interact and live out their experiences on stage. In drama, the characters/actors talk to themselves and react to issues according to the impulse of the moment. Drama is therefore presented in dialogue.

You can see that as a genre of literature, drama occupies a unique position. It is also the most active of other genres of literature because of the immediate impact it has on the audience. It is used to inform, to educate to entertain and in some cases to mobilize the audience.

Most people associate funny action or other forms of entertainment as drama. An action could be dramatic yet it will not be classified as drama.

The dramatic is used for any situation or action which creates a sense of an abnormality or the unexpected. Sometimes we use it to describe an action that is demonstrated or exaggerated. For instance, if you are at a bus stop, a well-dressed young girl passes and cat-walks across the road, her high-heeled shoes breaks and she slips, the immediate reaction will be laughter from almost everybody there. For some people, this is drama. Although she was walking in an abnormal way and unexpectedly her shoe breaks, her action could be called dramatic but it is not dramatic action. Again, the action of a teacher who demonstrates, by injecting life into his teaching as he acts out certain situations, is dramatic but it is not drama.



## **What then is drama?**

Drama is an imitation of life. Drama is different from other forms of literature because of its unique characteristics. It is read, but basically, it is composed to be performed, so the ultimate aim of dramatic composition is for it to be presented on stage before an audience. This implies that it is a medium of communication. It has a message to communicate to the audience. It uses actors to convey this message. This brings us to the issue of mimesis or imitation. We say that drama is mimetic which means that it imitates life. You may have heard people say that drama mirrors life. Yes, it is the only branch of literature which tries to imitate life and presents it realistically to the people. It is this mimetic impulse of drama that makes it appeal to people. Drama thrives on action.

The term drama is used at the following three (3) different levels:

1. Performance
2. Composition
3. Branch of Literature.

### **(1) Performance**

Drama is used for plays that are acted on stage or screen. These plays are different from musical performances because they must tell stories which are acted out by actors and actresses. You remember what we said earlier about imitation or re-enactment and impersonation. These actors and actresses must be playing roles by imitating other characters.

It means, therefore, that they must assume other people's personalities by bearing different names, ages, occupation, nationalities, etc. Finally, they must be conscious of themselves as actors by trying hard to pretend that they are the characters they are representing.

### **(2) Composition**

Drama is used to describe a dramatic composition which employs language and pantomime to present a story or series of events intended to be performed. Sometimes, especially with written compositions, they may not be presented on stage but this does not stop it from being drama. In as much as a play is enjoyed more when it is performed, you can still read a play and be entertained by it.

### **(3) Branch of Literature**

Drama is a term used for that branch of literature that covers dramatic composition. You know already that drama is a literary art. The basic difference between drama and other forms of literature (prose and poetry) is that drama is presented in dialogue from the beginning to

the end. Any information by the playwright is given in stage- direction. We have dialogue in prose and poetry but they are interjected in the course of the story.

### **3.3 Definition of Drama**

There are many definitions of drama.

Martin Esslin in *Anatomy of Drama* has the following definitions of drama:

1. Drama can be seen as a manifestation of the play instinct as in children who are playing mother and father.
2. Drama is something one goes to see, which is organized as something to be seen.
3. It is an enacted fiction an art form based on mimetic action.
4. In arts, drama is the most elegant expression of thought nearest to the truth (reality).
5. It is the most concrete form in which art can recreate human situation, human relationship (57).

Aristotle's definitions sum up these and other numerous definitions of drama by different scholars. He defines drama simply as an imitation of an action. He links it to the mimetic impulse in human beings like children playing father and mother in a childhood play. This means that imitation is part of life. Human beings have the desire to imitate others, situations or events.

However, Bertolt Brecht insists that drama is not just an imitation of action, but a tool for the demonstration of social conditions. It is not just an entertainment but an instrument of political and social change. From these definitions, we can conclude that drama is a way of creating or recreating a situation, an articulation of reality through impersonation or re-enactment. An action becomes drama if it is an imitation of an earlier action real or imagined. For instance, the story of a hunter who goes to the forest, kills an antelope and takes it home even if he is dancing as he goes home, is not drama. It becomes drama if the same story is reenacted maybe as part of a festival. In the later case, some people (actors) will represent the hunter and the antelope to the audience for entertainment or education. A young man who aspires to be a hunter could learn, from the presentation, how to stalk an animal or how to aim the gun or bow while being entertained. This story could be represented through mime, dance or in dialogue.

### **3.4 Imitation**

Imitation to some extent is a reflection of an action in real life. It is close to reality but not reality. In imitation you assume a role and not pretend. You take on or claim the personality of the person you are imitating. An imitation therefore involves an illusion of the reality and a willing suspension of disbelief. The actor creates an illusion of reality to make his action

credible. The audience in order to believe him suspends its doubt (disbelief) and believes that what it is watching is real. This explains why sometimes you are moved to tears as you watch the suffering of a particular character when you are watching a home video or any other dramatic presentation. This is called empathy, according to Aristotle, mimesis (imitation) entails some copying but not verbatim copying. The artist adjusts or adds to it. He therefore contributes to the original as he creates another world through imitation. Consequently, the product becomes not an appearance but a reality or at worst, a reflection of the reality. It is important to note here that the action might not have existed before in reality. The playwright could imagine or conceptualize an action, then write it down or present it.

### **3.5 Impersonation**

Imitation is a broader term for copying somebody or something. In impersonation we narrow it down to copying people. Generally, we impersonate or pretend to be somebody in order to deceive people or to entertain them. Usually, in an impersonation, the actor tries to be as convincing as possible. In acting this is called getting into the role.

Impersonation could be interchanged with role-playing. You have seen that impersonation is an important ingredient in drama because for the action to be real or life-like, the actors must convince the audience that they are the person or characters they are impersonating.

### **3.6 Re-Presentation**

Re-presentation is to give or show something again. In drama, the artist may have been inspired by a particular action and decides to re-produce it or re-represent it on stage. Here, it is not possible to re-present the action exactly as it appeared in its original form. Sometimes the dramatic composition is based on that action. We also use re-presentation when a particular performance is being presented again after its premiere or the original and first performance.

From our discussion so far, you have seen that the universal elements of drama are imitation, re-representation of action, impersonation or re-enactment. In any dramatic presentation, the actors must be conscious of themselves as actors, and also conscious of the audience. On the part of the audience, there must be an element of make believe or willing suspension of disbelief. This simply means that, they will pretend that what the actors are doing is real. On the part of the actors, they try as much as possible to convince the audience that they are presenting real life experience. This explains why you see actors who display realistic emotions on stage. For instance, an actor can cry realistically if the need arises. In order to achieve this feat, they try to get into the role they are playing so that the action will be as realistic as possible.

### **3.7 Re-enactment**

Re-enactment is similar to re-representation. However, in re-enactment, there is a clear indication that a particular action is being re-enacted. Persons or actions will impersonate specific characters in the original action. In traditional societies or oral literature, re-enactment is common and popular. During festivals, depending on the cultural background of the people and the environment, some events like hunting expedition, fishing, physical prowess and special feats at wars are re-enacted. In the enactment of a hunting expedition, some people are chosen to impersonate the animals while some impersonate the hunter who stalks and kills the animal. The jubilation and the dance of triumph end the performance.

Some dances like the “Egwu amala” from Delta State and some masquerades are used to re-enact past events or actions. Historical plays are mainly re-enactments of past events.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. In your own words, define drama.
- ii. What is the basic difference between drama and other genres of literature?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Drama is an imitation of an action. It is a branch of literature which is both literary art and representational art. As a literary art, it deals with fiction or an imaginary story that is presented through characters and dialogue. However, it is a special kind of fiction because it is designed to be acted out rather than narrated. When we read a novel or a short story, we understand and appreciate the story, through the narrator or author but in drama the characters live out the story for us. The playwright does not comment or explain anything. So, drama gives us a direct presentation of life experiences. That is why we say that it is a representational art. Drama, therefore, uses language in the form of gesture....or dialogue to present or to re-present an action. Characters are used to present the story. These characters are called actors.

### **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Give two definitions of drama by two different scholars and discuss them in the light of your understanding of the genre.

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# ORIGIN AND FUNCTIONS OF DRAMA

## Origin of Drama

The word drama comes from the Greek verb “dran” which means ‘to act’ or to perform. Many scholars trace the origin of drama to wordless actions like ritual dances and mimes performed by dancers, masked players or priests during traditional festivals or ceremonies. One account traces the origin to ritual. In the traditional society or in the primordial times, sometimes, the seasons did not come as expected. When this happened, men felt that they had offended the gods, so they devised means of appeasing these gods. That act of appeasing the gods is what we refer to as ritual. This ritual, as expected, involved a ceremony in which the priest played an important role at a designated location, mostly shrines. The priest would normally wear a special dress for the occasion. That role, the dress (costume), and the utterance or incantations are regarded as dramatic elements. Drama could therefore emerge from this. So, if it is presented for entertainment and there is an element of impersonation, imitation of an action, and re-enactment of an action, it is drama. Another account traces the origin to man’s desire for entertainment. Here, during festivals or other ceremonies, they recreate the feats of some legendary or mythical heroes to entertain the people.

Scholars are divided on the origin of drama. Some trace the origin to Greece but others insist that drama in its definitive form or pattern evolved from Egypt which is regarded as one of the cradles of civilization in the world. The latter group argues that it was borrowed by western merchants who developed and documented it, and who now trace the origin to Greece. However, the account of tracing the origin of drama to Greece is more plausible. The evolution is clearer and well-documented.

Apparently, Greek drama evolved from religious festivals (ritual) that were celebrated to ensure the fertility of the land and the well being of its people. These festivals were connected with the worship of the god Dionysius, a native god who like the vegetation dies and was reborn each year. The festival involved singing and dancing by a chorus of fifty men. The choral song, known as Dithyramb, was sang in honour of the god. The men danced around the altar of Dionysius in a circular dancing place called orchestra. Sometimes a story about the god was improvised by the leader of the chorus, though remaining part of the chorus. Sometimes he dresses like a character from mythology. At this stage, individual actors were not involved in the performances.

The dramatist, Thepsis, is believed to have been the first person to introduce the individual actor and the element of impersonation in the 6th century B.C. During a particular performance, he stood out from the chorus and instead of singing in the honour of the god, he

sang as the god. He performed between the dances of the chorus and he conversed at times with the leader of the chorus. Thus drama was literally born.

Thepsis, therefore appeared as the first actor, and when he broke away from the chorus, he added the dramatic potential of impersonation. It is impersonation, because, instead of describing the god, Dionysius, or his actions, he pretended to be the god. Thus the performance changed from poetry performance to drama. Aeschylus added the second actor and this gave drama a new thrust forward because the additional actor enabled the dramatist to show in action a dramatic conflict rather than talk about it. Sophocles' addition of the third actor further enlarged the scope of the dramatist and provided him with the means of complicating his plot and devising more complex structural arrangement of his action.

It is important to note here that speech is not of essence in drama because it could be presented without words or without the accompaniment of music/dance.

The important feature of drama is communication. It induces a personal communication and an immediate experience between the actor and the audience. This makes drama a concrete art and the message is immediate and direct. It is concrete because you can see the actors performing and presenting a life-like story which affects you positively or negatively and you react immediately. Accordingly, drama exists in both oral and literary traditions.

In this course, we will concentrate more on the literary tradition, i.e. the written drama. The text is called a play and the writer is called a playwright. However, we will make reference to drama as performance on stage from time to time because it is difficult to separate the two in the study of dramatic literature.

## **The Nature of Drama**

Drama has developed and been improved upon by various dramatists over the ages. It has also been influenced by the developments and changes in the world. The unique nature of drama makes it possible for it to be read and as also to be performed. Unlike the prose and poetry which depend on narration, drama is presented only through dialogue. The novel is divided in chapters and the poem is written mostly in stanzas, drama is presented in acts and scenes, movements or parts. William Shakespeare made the five-act structure the standard for his plays. Each dramatist is free to adopt his/her own style.

In addition to the fact that plays can be read and enjoyed by people in the privacy of their homes, people also watch and enjoy the plays as an audience in a theatre when the plays are presented on stage. The audience gives an immediate reaction to the performance on stage.

Drama is temporary in nature. Every performance has a definite duration (i.e. it lasts for a certain length of time). Each performance of a play is therefore a distinct work of art. Even if the actors, the composition and the decors remain unchanged throughout the production, each performance varies in nature and quality as one may be better than other. A good example is in a case where an actor may have performed badly in one production and better in another one. It means therefore that “every performance of a play, even by the same actors, represents a different realization of its possibilities and no single performance can fully realize all its possibilities”(Scholes 17). Once a performance is conducted, it ceases to exist except in one’s memory. Ritualistic presentations could also be viewed from the same perspective.

## **Functions of Drama**

Drama is said to have originated from ritual. It is an important branch of literature and the most concrete of all art forms. It is devoid of the distant intimacy of the novel, the abstract message of fine arts, the incomplete message of music or the cryptic and esoteric language of poetry. It presents a story realistically through the actors to the audience. Drama is therefore used to entertain, inform and educate people. You can see that it is the most effective tool for mass mobilization by the government and private agencies. For instance, most campaigns against AIDS, DRUG ABUSE, CHILD ABUSE and so on, are presented in form of drama to educate, enlighten while at the same time entertain the people.

Of all the creative artists, the dramatist is in the best position to mirror his society and to effect social reforms. This is because his work has a unique characteristic of presenting events in a vivid, picturesque and realistic manner. This helps to imprint social conditions realistically in the minds of the audience. Its message is therefore immediate. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, the literate and the illiterate enjoy and assimilate the message of drama once it is presented in the appropriate language as the actors live out the story (message) on stage.

In most traditional societies, drama forms part of the communal rites. In Africa, reenactment of some feats like hunting, warfare, and other events, are usually part of bigger festivals. Some of these events are presented in form of drama to entertain the audience. In Greece also, drama formed part of a bigger festival. Greek drama is acclaimed to be the earliest recorded form of drama (5<sup>th</sup> century B.C). It is said to have originated from the Dionysian religious rites, and also remained a communal rite during the classical period. The dramatists of this age gave insight into the philosophy and religious beliefs of the ancient Greece. These early Greek plays treated life’s basic problems with utmost honesty and attacked social ills using legendary and mythological themes. This helped to ensure sanity and equilibrium in the society.

In the Medieval period, drama was used to elucidate the message of the gospel through the re-enactment of the biblical stories during mass. It was later expanded to include the dramatization of the lives of the saints and other notable stories of the bible that did not form part of the Sunday's lessons. It was therefore used for the spiritual and moral growth of the people. Drama and theatre also played important roles in the social lives of the people in the ancient Roman Empire. In England, Germany and France, playwrights like Shakespeare, Brecht, Goethe, Moliere, and others, in varying degrees, used their works to enable their respective countries "... to carve out and affirm a unique identity" for themselves (Hagher 145). The American industrial sector was radically but positively affected through the intervention of one play, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. This play is regarded as being responsible for the spirit of industrial revolution in America.

In Africa, Kenya to be precise, a playwright, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o was arrested and detained because of the political and social consciousness which his play, *I Will Marry When I Want*, aroused in the audience after the production. The play was written and presented in his Gikuyu language; this enabled the audience, to assimilate its message immediately and to react accordingly. Ngugi was forced into exile. The drama of any society, therefore, reflects the problems, aspirations, philosophy and cultural background of the people.

You see that dramatists can use their works to help to shape the future of the societies. They can do this not only by reflecting the ugly sides of the societies but also by promoting the positive aspects of the people's way of life that are worth emulating or cultivating. They also help to ensure the continuity of their tradition and culture by reflecting them in their plays. Each dramatist, therefore, tries from his perspective to use his art to enlighten his audience on the goodness, imbalances and shortcomings of his society. Apart from their thematic concerns, each dramatist, in his own style of relaying his message, tries to highlight his cultural background through the use of myths, legends, music, songs, dances, proverbs, riddles, and other local expressions. In this way, dramatists all over the world are regarded as the conscience of their societies, and custodians of their moral and cultural values.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Discuss briefly the origin of drama in Greece.

### **CONCLUSION**

Drama is an imitation of an action. It is said to have originated from the Dionysian festival in Greece. All ceremonies and funny actions are not drama even though they may contain some dramatic elements. An action becomes drama if and when there is an element of impersonation, re-enactment or re-representation of an action. Drama mirrors the society, so playwrights are influenced by their socio-cultural backgrounds. They draw their themes or subject matters from myths, legends, history or contemporary issues. From the



days of Thepsis in Athens to the modern period, dramatists have tried to use their works to mirror their respective societies. During the early part of the development of drama, the dramatists tried to follow laid down rules of literary compositions. However, as time went on, the hard and fast rules of the theories of dramatic forms gave way to other techniques and forms. This is because each age tried to make its own innovations based on the socio-political or cultural peculiarities of their times. Some modern critics argue that playwrights should not be forced into accepting any rule on artistic creation. Drama is used to teach, inform and also entertain and its message is immediate. This explains why it is used in campaigns and social mobilization.

## **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

What is the role of Thepsis in the origin of drama.

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## **ELEMENTS OF DRAMA:**

### **1. PLOT**

#### **Definition of Plot**

A lot of volumes have been written on drama and aspects of drama of which plot is one of them. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines plot as a "plan or line of events of a story especially of a novel or a story". In dramatic plot, unlike in the novel where the author describes the characters and incidents they are involved in, the playwright presents the characters in action. This means that plot in drama develops through what the characters do or say, what is done to them, and or what is said about them or to them. This is why in his opinion, Grebanier describes plot as "a matter of action of deeds that are done during the course of the story".

In **One World of Literature**, Shirley Geak-Lin Lim, compiles the following definitions of plot from different scholars which I believe will give you a broader view of plot;

The plot as the organization of action was traditionally conceived as a sequence of important moments arranged chronologically, with an introduction, series of complications intensifying the conflict, a climax clinching the fate of the central characters, a resolution and a denouement that concludes and summarizes the issues (p. 1107).

Plot is the organization of a series of action or events usually moving through conflicts to a climax and resolution. The arrangement often implies causality and achieves certain effects (p.1135). Plot does not concentrate on an individual hero or his fate or her fate. Instead, its open structure permits the inclusion of other important but minor characters. (p. 1108).

In his own contribution, Oscar Brockett maintains that plot is not just a summary of the incidents of a play but that it also refers to the organization of all elements into a meaningful pattern, the overall structure of the play(6). In *Play Production*, Nelms sees plot as the anecdote told to illustrate the theme, and the bare bones of the action and therefore the key to the structure of the play. According to Scholes and Klaus, plot is a highly specialized form of experience. In drama, every event is part of a carefully designed pattern and process. And that is what we call plot. He explains that plot is "...a wholly interconnected system of events, deliberately selected and arranged, in order to fulfill a complex set of dramatic purposes and theatrical conditions... it comprises everything which takes place in the imaginative world of the play. And the totality of the events must create a coherent imitation of the world" (65).

You have seen that there are many opinions on plot but I cannot conclude without looking at the insistence of the foremost critic Aristotle that tragedy is an imitation not of men but of an action and of life. He further explains that since life consists of action plot is the most important aspect and the soul of tragedy. He mentioned tragedy specifically because then, the comic writers were allowed to invent their own plots. The Greek tragic plots were based on the destiny of man and the gods were involved in the action. The tragic poet (playwright) was expected to base the plot on true events, myths and legends and so his choice was limited because not many families were "doomed" and not many individuals were driven to murder or incest that aroused pity and fear. He maintains that incidents presented, must be according to the law of probability and necessity.

Plot is the structure of the actions which is ordered and presented in order to achieve particular emotional and artistic effects in a play. It helps to give the play an organic unity and a coherence that makes the play easy to understand. A good play should therefore possess a unified plot. Plot in simple terms is the arrangement of a story in such a way that there will be a sequential, logical and chronological order. The plot should be arranged in such a way

that the action starts from the beginning rises to a climax and falls to a resolution. It is arranged in this form – exposition, discovery, point of attack, complication, crisis, climax, denouement or resolution.

Some people confuse plot with story. To them, plot means a story which the play tells. It is therefore necessary at this point to make the distinction between plot and story so that you will not fall into the same error. A story is a series of incidents whose development does not necessarily depend on each other which means that the incidents may or may not be related or connected. Plot on the other hand, is the way the story is arranged and it thrives on causality and logical unity. In it, one incident happens and as a result the next one happens and the situation must be related to each other. It has a beginning, middle and an end. A beginning gives rise to the middle, which in turn raises the dramatic question that is answered in the end, thus completing what was started in the beginning.

Dramatic plot is also expected to produce a result or an effect on the audience. The playwright, therefore, tries to fashion his play in a particular way to produce a particular impression on his audience. This explains why a theme like corruption, could be treated by different playwrights. Each playwright by the use of plot and other devices gives his own perspective, understanding of what corruption is, its effects on the society and why it should be eradicated. He could, also, in the course of the plot, suggest means or ways through which corruption can be reduced to a barest minimum or its complete eradication. The success of a play depends mainly on the plot. It helps the audience or reader to understand the theme and the motivations of the characters in the play.

Playwrights design their plots in most cases, to achieve different purposes like to create tragic comic or ironic effects. As the plot progresses, it arouses the reader's curiosity and expectations concerning future events in the play especially the fate of some characters. This is called suspense. A good playwright makes an effective use of suspense to sustain his audience. Plot is a highly specialized form of experience.

Let us use our daily experiences to illustrate and see just how specialized it is by considering what happens to us daily: we probably converse with a number of people and perform a variety of action. But most of these events have very little to do with one another, and they usually serve no purpose other than to satisfy our pleasure, our work, or our bodily necessities. Thus the events that take place in our daily existence do not and cannot embody a significant pattern or process even in a boarding school.

There is an extent to which a person's life can be patterned. But in drama, every event is part of a carefully designed pattern and process. And this is what we call plot. In a good plot, the interest of spectators has to be deeply engaged and continuously sustained. This means that the plot must be arranged in such a way that the interest must be aroused and engaged by events

that make up a process capable of being represented on stage. This means that plot is not confined merely to what takes place on stage. Plot includes reported, as well as represented, action. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, we witness what we might call a process of criminal investigation, in which the investigator discovers himself to be the criminal and inflicts the appropriate punishment for his crime. You will also notice that in the play, we do not witness all of the events that make up that process and contribute to its development.

The three types of action in drama are reported, physical and mental. In reported action, an action that is not part of the present action on stage is reported by a character or a group of characters. The action could be about an incident in the past like the death of Polybus or an incident that happened in the course of the action of the play. In the play, the wisdom of the oracle is reported by Creon, the death of Polybus is reported by the First Messenger, the suicide of Jocasta and the self blinding of Oedipus are reported by the Second Messenger.

Obviously, all of these events take place in the imaginative world of the play but are not presented directly to the audience. (Can you recall other reasons why some of these events are not presented on stage?) They are part of the plot. But they are not part of what we call the scenario-----the action that takes place on stage. Thus if we wish to identify the plot of a play, we will have to distinguish it from the scenario because it is not the same thing as the plot. We can recognize this distinction in another way if we consider the order in which events may be presented to us in a play. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, the death of Polybus takes place before the time of the action on stage however it is reported to us only after the stage action is well under way.

The physical action is based on the current incidents in the play, the concrete action on stage. It includes the movements, gestures, facial expressions and other forms of physical action made by the characters and seen by the audience. The mental action includes the action in which the audience is left to imagine what happened. In most cases, it comes at the end of the play as the audience is left to imagine what happened to a character or a group of characters. This is one of the main reasons why movie producers produce the part two of some of their films. In the plot, of course, these events are linked to one another by an unalterable chronology. But in the scenario, these same events have been presented to us in an entirely different order. Thus in studying the plot of a play, we must examine not only the events of which it consists, but also the complex ways in which those events are presented by the scenario.

### **Structure of the Plot**

As stated earlier, a good plot should have a beginning, middle, and an end. Oscar Brockett explains further that the beginning contains the exposition or the setting forth of information about earlier events, the identity of characters and the present situation. Another aspect of the

beginning is the point of attack which is the moment at which the main story starts as a potential conflict is identified. This is more obvious in classical plays usually, is focused early on the potential conflict or a question and its resolution leads to the end of the play. Such plays start with the inciting incident. This incident is usually an occurrence that sets the main action in motion. A good example is in found in Oedipus Rex. In the play, there is a plague in Thebes, the people are suffering and lamenting. Oedipus seeks solution from the oracle of Delphi and this leads to the major dramatic question (in this case, the identity of Oedipus) around which the play revolves.

The middle is made up of series of complications. A complication is a new element which changes the direction of the action. It leads to the discovery of new information. The series of complications culminate in crises and climax. In the play, the complication starts with the arrival of Creon with the information that the killer they seek is in their midst. Consequently, the blind seer is invited and there are more complications as he accuses Oedipus of being the murderer. There is a crisis with the shepherd's revelation of the true parentage of Oedipus and this leads to the climax. The end is the last part of the play. Here issues are unraveled, untied and resolved. In the play, the killer of Laius is discovered towards the denouement. Oedipus realizes that he has fulfilled the Delphic oracle's prophecy; he actually killed his father and married his mother.

It is important to note here that you may not find all these elements in one play. Each playwright adopts his own style. Remember that Aristotle based his theory and postulations on already –written Greek plays. Apparently, he read and studied the plays critically to arrive at his conclusions.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. What is plot?

### **CONCLUSION**

Plot is the arrangement of incidents in the play. Like all other elements of fiction, it has interdependence with character. Any competent writer organizes the incidents in such a way that each will have the maximum impact on the reader's response and advance the story's total objective. If the incidents are arranged sequentially from the beginning to the end and one event leads to the other, you will say that the play has a chronological, causal plot. If however they are presented in a disjointed manner, you say that it has an episodic plot. Simple plot is when the story is straightforward and easy to understand but when it is difficult, you say that it has a complicated or complex plot.

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## **2. ACTION**

Action is another element of drama.

### **2.1 Dramatic Action**

In simple terms, action is the process of doing something or the performance itself. If somebody slaps you and you retaliate, there is an action. The series of events that constitute the plot in any literary work is referred to as action. It includes what the characters say, do, think and in some cases, fail to do. Action involves activity. This activity becomes more pronounced in drama where the action is presented in concrete form as the actors present the story to the audience for entertainment and education. In drama, especially during performance, you see the characters moving around to perform certain tasks, talk to one another, laugh, cry, fight, shoot or do any thing according to the needs of the moment. All these are dramatic actions. In the novel, you read the story as is told by the novelist and see the action in your imagination but in drama the dramatist presents the action through what the characters do or say. In fact it involves all the activities of all the characters in the play.

Drama is the only genre of literature in which the story is presented in dialogue from the beginning to the end. However, dialogue alone does not constitute dramatic action. What makes it drama is the action that is involved. Dramatic action includes facial expression, gestures and movements. So, what makes dialogue dramatic is the presence of action.

It is only through action that the playwright can portray the human situations he chooses to dramatize. It is the action that propels the plot and helps to advance the theme. In simple terms drama is a story told in action by actors who impersonate the characters in the story on a stage.

Dramatic action is a "...series of incidents that are logically arranged by the playwright to achieve specific response like joy, pity, fear, indignation, ridicule, laughter, thoughtful contemplation, from the audience". (Brocket 68) Each character is specially created to fulfill the specific design of the dramatist. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, for instance, Efua Sutherland deliberately created Ananse to be an intelligent, witty, crafty and easy-going man. His nature helps him to get not only a rich husband for his daughter

but also ensures that the man who marries his daughter actually loves her. The playwright also advances her theme of excessive materialism and ostentation in Ghana through the easy-going nature and action of Ananse. If you have read the play, you will recall that Ananse, decides to go to church only when he became rich. It shows that people go to church to show off and display their wealth; according him:

Yes, tomorrow, I go church,

To deposit with the best of spenders.

He also decides to attend the memorial services ‘which promises to draw the biggest crowds’. This helps to highlight the playwright’s view on the ostentatious nature of the society.

What is causality? Is there any relationship between causality and dramatic action? Yes. According to Oscar Brocket, “the cause to effect arrangement of incidents sets up the situation; the desires and motivations of the characters out of which the later events develop” (32). This logical arrangement of incidents presupposes that the action must be presented in such a way that it should make sense to the audience. Any action performed by any character must be as a result of an earlier action. Thus in the play *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Ananse is poor so decides to take an action that will help him to get rich. What does he do? He decides to give his daughter out in marriage and in the process make

money for himself. He writes to four wealthy chiefs. The effect of this action is that they send money and gifts to him. The effect of this is that he becomes rich. The effect of the wealth is that he pays her daughter’s school fees and renovates his house.

The action in drama is usually organized in a climatic order with the scenes increasing in interest by increasing suspense and emotional intensity. In the play, from Ananse’s action in the opening scene, when it appears that Ananse wants to sell his daughter Anansewa like ‘some parcel to a customer’, your interest is aroused. The next thing is to find out how he is going to do it. As the play progresses, and Ananse entangles himself in the mess, the suspense and emotional intensity is heightened. You can see now that dramatic action is constructed in such a way that it answers the suspenseful question, ‘what happened’. Action in drama involves gestures, facial expressions, inflexion of voice and movement. Some gestures and expressions actually present more actions than words.

Dramatic action also includes what the character fails to do. In *Hamlet*, the popular quote ‘to be or not to be’ refers to the action. Hamlet is contemplating on the proper action to take against his uncle who he suspects killed his father. He does not want to act until he is sure of it. He therefore organizes a play and presents a similar experience in the play. Luckily, he gets the desired effect as Claudius’ reaction points to his guilt. It would have been possible for Hamlet to

kill Claudius' immediately but that would have been the end of the play. So, Hamlet's inaction helps to increase the suspense and emotional intensity of the play.

You can see that all the actions mentioned here are logical. For the action to be logical, the characters must be well- motivated.

## **2.2 Motivation**

Motivation is the drive behind every action a character takes in a play. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, poverty drives Ananse to 'sell' his daughter. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the girls are excited as they discuss the magazine that contains Sidi's pictures. Their excitement is motivated by the fact they have never seen the picture of anybody from their community in a magazine. Also in the play, Baroka's motivation for marrying Sidi is to subdue her and prevent her from being more popular than him. What this means is that there must be a reason for any action taken by every character in the play. In drama, because the action is presented in dialogue and the playwright does not have the space to explain the action like the novelist, some of the actions that cannot be incorporated in dialogue are presented in the stage direction. The explanation of the action in the stage direction helps the reader to enjoy the action and also helps the director in the blocking of the play during rehearsals before the performance.

## **3. ELEMENTS OF DRAMA: DIALOGUE**

### **3.1 What is dialogue?**

Dialogue is a discussion between two or more people. In literary works, it refers to a composition in a conversational form. In the novel it is incorporated in the story, that is, as the story progresses, the novelist gives two or more characters the opportunity to discuss or comment on certain issues and the story continues in prose form. However, in drama, the entire story is presented in dialogue. This explains why some people find it difficult to read plays because you see the name of a character, then, what the character says, the name of another character and the response as seen below: In addition to that, you must read the stage direction for you to understand the story, the motivation of the characters, the place where the action is taking place and other information provided about the environment and the personality of the characters. Many people therefore find the reading of a play cumbersome and prefer to read a novel where they read and enjoy the story without interruption. Can you identify the names of the characters, the stage direction?

ANANSE: [When the song is over] While life is whipping you, rain also pours down to whip you some more. Whatever it was that man did wrong at the beginning of things must have been



really awful for all of us to have to suffer so. [He calls:] Anansewa ! Where is that typewriter of yours? Bring it here. [Pause] I've been thinking, thinking, and thinking, until my head is earth quaking. Won't somebody who thinks he has discovered the simple solution for living this life kindly step forward and help out the rest of us? [To the audience:]

Oh the world is hard,  
Is hard,  
The world is really hard.

[Taking off his raincoat and calling again] Anansewa ! Where is that typewriter I bought for you at a price that nearly drove me to sell myself? Bring it here. [He closes up the umbrella.]

[Enter ANANSEWA dressed for going out, and receives the typewriter from PROPERTY MAN.]

ANANSEWA: Oh father, is it raining?

ANANSE: Yes, it's raining. It's rain combining with life to beat your father down. [He leans the umbrella against the wall.]

ANANSEWA: Oh. I didn't even know you were not in the house.

The short dialogue above is taken from *The Marriage of Anansewa* and it is an exchange between Ananse and his daughter. Their names are written in bold letters to indicate that what follows is what the person says. This is unlike what we have in the novel where what is said by a character is marked off with inverted commas and the novelist will indicate who said it.

Dialogue could be described as a verbal interchange of thoughts or ideas. The Oxford Dictionary explains that dialogue involves two or more people and could be in form of expression, conversation, talk, chat, tête-à-tête, chit chat, debate, argument, exchange of views, discussion, conference, converse, interlocution, confabulation, gossip, parley, palaver, spoken part, script, and lines. The forms of dialogue listed above can be found in drama depending on the perspective of the play; the particular section of the play; the dramatic mode or the message the playwright wants to convey. You may ask how debate or conference could form part of dialogue in a play. It is possible for the playwright to create a scene on a conference and as the conference is going on, there could be question and answer session which involves dialogue. This applies to other forms of dialogue listed above.

Scholes and Klaus (1971) that dialogue is an extraordinary significant form of conversation because it is through it that every play implies the total make-up of its imaginative world. It is also important that dialogue imply the whole range of expressions, gestures, inflections, movements and sometimes information on the environment and the total atmosphere of the play. Read the example below, an excerpt from *The Lion and the Jewel* and see what you can infer from it.

LAKUNLE: Sidi, my love will open your mind  
Like the chaste leaf in the morning, when  
The sun touches it.

SIDI: If you stat that I will run away  
I had enough of that nonsense yesterday.

LAKUNLE: Nonsense? Nonesense? Do you hear that?  
Does anybody listen? Can the stones  
Bear to listen to this? Do you call it  
Nonesense that I poured the waters of a=my soul  
To wash your feet?

SIDI: You did what?

LAKUNLE: Wasted! Wasted! Sidi, my heart  
Bursts into flowers with may love.  
But you and the dead of this village  
Trample it with the feet of ignorance.

SIDI: [shakes her head in bafflement]  
If the snail finds splinters in his shell  
He changes house. Why do you stay?

LAKUNLE: Faith. Because I have faith.  
Oh Sidi, vow to me your own undying love  
And I will scorn the jibes of these bush minds  
Who know no better. Swear, Sidi,  
Swear you will be my wife and  
I will stand against earth, heaven, and nine  
Hells...

SIDI: Now there you go again.  
One little thing  
And you must chirrup like a cockatoo.  
You talk and talk and deafen me  
With wit words which always sound the same  
And make no meaning.  
I've told you and I say it again  
I shall marry you today, next week

Or any day you name  
 But my bride-price must first be paid.  
 Aha, now you turn away.  
 But I tell you, Lakunle I must have  
 The full bride-price. Will you make me  
 A laughing-stock? Well, do as you please.  
 But Sidi will not make herself  
 A cheap bowl for the village spit.  
 LAKUNLE: O n my head fall their scorn.  
 SIDI:           They will say I was no virgin  
 That I was forced to sell my shame  
 And marry you without a price.  
 LAKUNLE: A savage custom, barbaric, outdated,  
 Rejected, denounced, accursed,  
 Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,  
 Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.  
 SIDI:           Is the bag empty? Why did you stop?  
 LAKUNLE: I own a Shorter Companion  
 Dictionary, but I have ordered  
 The Longer One-you wait!  
 SIDI:           Just pay the price.

From this dialogue between Lakunle and Sidi, you can see that Lakunle is an educated buffoon who wants to marry a lady in the village without fulfilling the requirements of the people's customs. He apes the white man and despises the African cultural heritage. Sidi is a decent but uneducated village girl who wants to maintain her dignity.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Open any page of one of the plays recommended for this course, read that page very well and write the things you learn about the characters and or the central idea of the play.

### **CONCLUSION**

Dialogue is a verbal communication between two or more people and it is very important to the dramatist especially in written plays. The story of drama is presented through the characters as they talk to one another and relate to one another. Characters are revealed through dialogue. Also incidents and events are exposed and explicated through dialogue.

### **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Explain what you understand by dialogue and state its importance in drama.

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## **DRAMATIC GENRES** FORMS/TYPES OF DRAMA: TRAGEDY, COMEDY, TRAGI-COMEDY, MELODRAMA

### **INTRODUCTION**

This unit introduces you to a detailed study of dramatic genres. You need this background to enable you appreciate different forms of drama in the course of your study. The classification is also necessary for both the playwright and the critics in their appreciation of dramatic composition.

### **OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Know and explain the dramatic genres.
- State and explain the major dramatic genres.
- Be able to distinguish in clear terms the characteristics of the different dramatic genres.
- Be able, while reading a play, to determine its genre.

## **Dramatic Genre**

Drama is grouped into distinct types, kinds or categories because there are qualities that are common to all dramatic compositions. There are also qualities that make each composition unique. It is these similarities and differences that determine each genre. The dramatic genres include tragedy, comedy, tragi-comedy, melodrama, drame, mime, etc.

### **Tragedy**

We are familiar with the words 'tragedy' and tragic as they are associated with misfortune. Usually, they are used to describe personal misfortunes that do not concern the rest of the society. For example, the breakdown of a marriage or death of a dear one in an accident or even natural causes could be described as tragic. Also, some public events that are unpleasant like the assassination of a head of state or a political leader, natural or human disasters like earthquakes, flood disasters, plane crashes and other such disasters are referred to as tragedies. In this unit we are not concerned with these tragedies or tragic' events in our daily lives but as they relate to dramatic compositions.

Tragedy according to the Oxford English Dictionary is “a play of a serious or solemn kind ... a very sad event, action or experience.” The last part of the definition explains why the word is used to describe misfortunes, natural and human disasters in everyday life. However, we will be concerned with the aspect of the definition that sees tragedy as a play of a serious or a solemn kind.

Tragedy in drama is believed to have originated from the Greek worship of Dionysius, the god of wine and fertility. During the festival, the dithyramb, a choral lyric in honour of the god is sang and danced around the altar by fifty men dressed in goat-skin (goat was the sacred animal of the god). This is perhaps from where tragedy got its name because in Greek, “tragoedia” meant goat song. During this song, a story about the god was improvised by the choral leader but later Thepsis stood out and instead of singing in honour of Dionysius, sang as Dionysius. However, the song continued but a minimal part of it was acted by one actor. As time went on, the spoken part was increased and Aeschylus added a second actor while Sophocles added a third actor. As time went on, the number of chorus decreased gradually as more actors increased. Thus tragedy was born. The scope of the plays increased as they started including myths concerning other gods. The plays became so popular that by 534 BC, the state gave official recognition to tragedy and instituted a prize for the best tragedy presented at the annual Donyisian festival.

Tragedy is the most esteemed of all the dramatic genres. It has attracted many definitions and rules, from the days of Aristotle, who is the first person to write on the circumstances of and what tragedy should be, to the present day. According to him in his “Poetics”:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornaments, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting a proper purgation of these emotions.

Aristotle explains all the aspects of this definition and moves further to give the elements of tragedy as plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle. Try to read Aristotle’s “Poetics”. These principles have continued to influence the definition till date. However, some dramatic scholars agree with him while some others disagree with him.

In drama, tragedy is a serious play that deals with the misfortunes of man. It presents a man (tragic hero) who is not too virtuous or too vicious but one who aspires for higher ideals. He tries to improve himself and the world around him. In the course of this, he makes a mistake, or commits an error of judgment. This leads to his fall. Traditionally, in classical tragedies, the hero must be of noble birth, suffer and is overwhelmed in the end. Tragedy presents injustice, evil, pain, misfortunes, paradoxes and mysterious aspects of human existence.

Greek tragedy has a set pattern or structure. It starts with the prologue which introduces the play with the episodes of the play and the choral songs in between and finally the exodus. The play contains a “single integral plot” which is presented in a very short period with one setting.

The action could be simple or complex and contains a reversal of fortune or discovery or both. They are very short plays and many of them were presented in trilogies. The tragic hero is drawn from princes and kings. He is a man who is not pre-eminently good, virtuous or vicious but who commits an error of judgment. Oedipus Rex is a good example of classical tragedy. It has a single plot, the story of how Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. The setting is just in front of the palace. Oedipus, the tragic hero is a king who by the end of the play, discovers the truth about himself, his fortune reverses from good to bad. His catastrophe is caused by his tragic flaw which is arrogance.

The plays were based on myth and legends drawn mainly from the legends of the house of Atreus and the events of the Trojan wars. They were presented as a part of a great festival and the state was involved. Music, songs and dances were important elements of the plays. To maintain a single setting, indoor actions and violence were reported on stage. As part of a religious festival, the plays were used to show how vices like arrogance and pride lead men to destruction. The gods also play important roles in Greek tragedy. However, the dramatists differ in their attitudes to the gods as characters in their plays.

Many critics argue that there are no tragedies in the modern period. The argument is based on the fact that many playwrights do not adhere to the Aristotelian principles of tragedy especially as regards the treatment of the subject matter, tragic hero and the language.

Modern playwrights feel that they should not be restricted by any rules. According to them, drama reflects the society, so they should reflect their society in the works. In the modern society, little or no attention is paid to kings, princes and their exploits so a poor man who is hard working can rise to esteem. The society also encourages him to rise. He also has the capacity to fall into misfortune through an error of judgment and according to Arthur Miller, since kings and monarchs are no longer available, tragedy should be based "... on the heart and spirit of the average man" (Dukore: 897). Contemporary issues and human beings should, therefore, be treated in tragedy.

The important factor is that the tragic hero pursues a particular goal he believes in relentlessly to its logical conclusion even if he loses his life in the pursuit. Tragedy attempts, therefore, to ask some basic questions about human existence like, is there justice in the world?

## **Comedy**

We use the words 'comedy' and comic to describe something that is funny in our everyday lives. These include a joke, or a fantastic story that is full of nonsense, or an absurd appearance that makes us giggle, smile or laugh. Comedy is not inherent in things or people but the way things/people are perceived. Comedy is a deliberate presentation of events/ experiences drawn from real life but not the same with real life. We should therefore not expect dramatic comedy to be the same as real life.

Generally, the plays have good endings or resolutions, so when a play ends happily, we refer to it as comedy. In most comedies, the principal characters begin in a state of opposition either to one another or to their world or both. By the end of the play, their opposition is replaced by harmony. Aristotle in his "Poetics" insisted that in tragedy men are shown "better than they are", while in comedy "worse than they are". For him it is an artistic imitation of men of inferior moral bent, not in every way but only in so far as their shortcomings are ludicrous. These shortcomings cause no pain.

In the classical period there was no mixture of genres Horace maintains that tragic characters must be noble while comic characters are ignoble and of lower birth and foolish. Moliere believed that his audience could learn from the dramatization of ridiculous and universal types. Comedy therefore teaches through laughter. Philip Sidney, in "Arts Poetica", sees it as an imitation of common errors of life which is presented in the most ridiculous and scornful manner so that the spectator is anxious to avoid such errors himself. It should aim at being delightful though not necessarily by provoking laughter. Ben Jonson also believes that laughter

does not really help to achieve the aims of comedy but may subvert those aims. He draws his theme from human errors and follies.

He insists that the playwright should attempt to improve moral life and arouse gentle affections. John Dryden insists that comedy should portray the eccentricity of character while Northrop Frye says that lightness of touch is the hallmark of comedy. We recognize comedy through its style, characterization, diction and other elements of style. The purpose of comedy is to delight, to teach and to entertain the audience through the presentation of characters, situations and ideas in a ridiculous manner. This helps to keep man close to sanity, balance and to remind him of human frailties. It helps to keep him humble and mindful of what he is rather than what he might wish himself to be.

Modern scholars believe that the purpose of comedy is to correct vices therefore should not exclude any class. Satire is an important instrument in comedy because nothing reforms majority of men like the portrayal of their faults. It is easy for people to endure being made fun of. Many people may have no objection to being considered wicked but are not willing to be considered ridiculous. The audience is thus expected to learn from the stupidity of the characters and try to avoid such pitfalls because nobody likes to be made an object of ridicule.

Generally speaking, comedy adopts a different approach from that of serious drama. It presents the incongruity in people and situations. In doing this, the playwright suspends the natural laws; for instance, a man falls flat on the floor but does not really hurt himself. Comedy is usually presented as a moral satire used to attack vices like greed, hypocrisy, lust, laziness, or ignorance. The aim is to correct social ills, social injustice or to ridicule a particular human fault or social imbalance. It thrives on exaggeration of situation and character to show mankind worse than it really is.

Since drama is a conscious and deliberate presentation of events/experience based mostly on real life but not the same with real life, one should, therefore, not expect comedy to be the same with real life. We recognize comedy, through its style, characterization and dialogue. In both real life and drama, comedy should indicate a kind of pleasure which finds physical expression in laughter or smile.

## **Melodrama**

### Definition

The word melodrama is coined from melo (music) and dran (drama). It is, therefore, a play that utilizes music extensively. But the utilization of music is not the only factor in melodrama, what really makes it melodrama is its portrayal of the protagonist and the antagonist. The protagonist suffers a lot but triumphs in the end while the antagonist suffers. So, melodrama can be defined as a play that has serious action caused by a villain and a



destruction of the villain which brings about a happy resolution in the play. The hero is usually involved in very dangerous circumstances but is rescued or he disentangles himself at the last possible moment. The rescuer is usually a benevolent character who identifies himself with the good role of the protagonist. An ideal melodrama, therefore, must have a protagonist and an antagonist. The protagonist always fights the antagonist who is usually poised to destroy goodness. In the end, the characters are easily identified by the audience. The protagonist is admired and the antagonist is hated. It is this identification by the audience that provides the grounds for poetic justice because the antagonist loses in the end. This explains why some critics insist that melodrama is an honest dramatic form.

According to them, it is the only form of drama that expresses the truth of human condition as they are perceived most of the time. This is a condition where vice is condemned and virtue applauded or where the bad man is punished and the good man rewarded.

Like tragedy, melodrama deals with characters in critical situations. The main difference is in the point of view. Outwardly, it tries to create the illusion of real people at genuine risk or in jeopardy but the playwright manipulates the play in such a way that it ends with a reprieve or a rescue, a reform or a triumph for the protagonist. There is always an escape from danger in the plot line. In melodrama, there is always serious excitement, suspense and thrills for the audience. The plot is built on tension and great excitement but this is transitory and lends no substantial significance to the action of the play.

The plot therefore contains stories with colourful but brave characters. It creates opportunities for strong sensational scenes, powerful emotions, and strong characters that struggle against deadly odds. Sometimes they are trapped in precarious situations but they must hold on until there is help ultimately.

The melodramatic hero is usually a one-dimensional figure who pursues a goal in a straightforward manner. The opposition comes from the world around him. He does not always think well before taking an action. Consequently, he gets involved in entanglements or dangerous situations which a more rational person might avoid. The characters are usually simple in mind and heart and are conditioned or influenced by their backgrounds and environment. Melodrama contains most of the serious conflicts and crises of daily life. In melodrama, we are resigned as we realize that our failures are not our fault but caused by others and our victories are as a result of help from other people. It is a serious play because most of the time, they rely on strong story lines but lacks the essential magnitude in character and the action is usually over exaggerated.

### **Characteristics of Melodrama**

1. It looks at human beings as a whole. People are expected to interact and help one another in the society. This explains why the protagonist is usually assisted or aided by someone for him to triumph or succeed.
2. It sees human beings as encountering and enduring outer conflicts and not inner ones in a generally hostile and wicked world.
3. These human conflicts end in victory. Melodramatic characters either win or lose. However, in the spirit of poetic justice, the protagonist usually wins despite the difficulties he encounters in the course of the action to show that good triumphs over evil.
4. There is an over simplification of human experiences which are usually exaggerated in such a way that the main thesis of the play is made transparent.
5. It treats a serious subject matter in a serious manner, though exaggerated.

### **Comparison between Melodrama and Tragedy**

1. In tragedy, the tragic hero commits an error of judgment which leads to his downfall. In melodrama, the hero faces overwhelming problems but despite his sufferings, he triumphs in the end.
2. Melodrama is usually episodic and contains elements of charm or magic. It, therefore, lacks the honesty of tragedy.
3. While tragedy evokes fear and pity, melodrama arouses suspense, pathos, terror and sometimes hatred. In tragedy, there is genuine pity and fear as the audience empathies with the hero. Pity in melodrama borders on sentimentality and emotion and when fear is portrayed, it is usually superficial. Pity and fear in tragedy are honest and lead to catharsis (purgation of emotions).
4. There is recognition for the hero in tragedy but in melodrama, the protagonist wins or triumphs always.
5. Tragedy confronts good and evil with unblinking honesty, while melodrama escapes from life. Tragedy considers eternal spiritual problems and ideals but melodrama deals with the transitory material/physical issues or problems.
6. Tragedy is known as a serious dramatic genre but the seriousness in melodrama is only a pretense to create theatrical effects for the audience.

### **Tragi-comedy**

You have seen that tragedy is a serious play that ends on a sad note, while comedy ends happily. In traditional tragedy, playwrights are not allowed to bring in any comic action. If you read

Oedipus Rex, for instance, you will observe that the atmosphere is tense from the beginning to the end. As time went on, even from the Elizabethan period, comic characters were included in tragic plays. This is called comic relief. Tragi-comedy is a play that mixes both comic and tragic elements in equal proportion of each. It therefore elicits both tragic and comic emotions.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- (1) Discuss the characteristics of melodrama.
- (2) What differentiates tragedy from melodrama?

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## **TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this section, you will be introduced to how to analyse plays and appreciate their effectiveness as dramatic texts. The common approaches to the analysis of literary texts are content and form. Content deals with the theme and subject matter. Form comprises such stylistic features as plot, characterization, setting, language and other dramatic devices used in the play.

### **Textual Analysis**

Textual analysis in drama is the evaluation of a written play. In the evaluation, you are expected to read the play very well and highlight how effectively or otherwise the playwright has utilized the elements and devices of drama in the composition of his play. The dramatic techniques used are also discussed. As you analyse a play, you are expected to identify the theme, how appropriate the characters are, if they are consistent and their actions are properly motivated. The language is another area that needs attention as you determine if there is consistency. The relationship between the message of the play and the method used to relay the message is also examined. You can take the following steps for an effective textual analysis:

- a) Read the play for the first time and enjoy the story.

- b) Read the play again with your notebook and dictionary by your side.
- c) Use the dictionary to find out the meaning of the words you are not familiar with and form notes on the plot, theme, characterization and other relevant information.
- d) Read it again and again to fill in the gaps and ensure that you have obtained the required information.
- e) Rewrite your note properly, and revise it as many times as possible.

## **Content/Theme**

In the analysis of a play, the first issue that comes to mind is the theme.

Theme is the main idea in a play that permeates the entire play. How do you identify the theme of a play? Themes are identified through the dialogue, actions and manifestations in the actions of the major characters as they interact with other characters in the play. The interpersonal relationships of the characters help to highlight and advance that particular idea. Themes in drama include corruption, love, revenge, and many others. The theme is the message which the playwright wants to send across to his audience and a play could have more than one theme. The playwright could draw his germinal idea from an incident or event in his contemporary society. It could also be drawn from history, legend, myth or folklore but the important factor is that there is a message he sends to the audience.

The playwright is said to be the conscience of his society, a teacher and an entertainer. He therefore strives to educate, inform and entertain his audience. This explains why he presents his theme through an interesting story and chooses the most appropriate dramatic form. For example, Bernard Shaw decides to dramatise the themes of love and war through comedy, while Shakespeare presents his theme of revenge through tragedy.

The theme of the story is what gives it significance because without a recognizable and definable theme, a story will be trite and pointless. A clearly focused theme is the story's "motivating force". In Oedipus Rex for instance, the theme is man's quest for his identity. The sub-theme is man's helplessness in the hands of fate or the gods. If we take the main theme, we will see that Oedipus' search for his true parents leads him to kill his father and marry his mother, while his search for the cause of the plague in his kingdom and the murderer of King Laius leads to his search for his own identity. The search for his own identity leads to his doom. Everyman explores the summons of death for mankind and man's readiness to meet his creator. In explicating this theme, the play dramatizes the struggle between virtue and vice for supremacy in a man's life. The question of man's ultimate fate is also explored. It concludes with the fact that only man's good deed is important for his salvation.

Consciously or unconsciously, every playwright has his theme in mind in choosing the style to adopt. The characters, the setting, the language, the plot, are chosen in such a way that should advance the major theme of the story. However, you must bear in mind the fact that a story may have one or more themes. It is also possible that each reader may discover a different theme or a multiplicity of themes in the same play.

You should not worry about this. Literature is open to different interpretations and as literary students, you should be able to identify your position and substantiate it with facts from the play. You can see that in the example of Oedipus above, I used the first theme of man's search for his identity. If I decide to use the theme of man's helplessness as the major theme, I will state how Oedipus was born and there was a prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother.

His parents believe that they can avert the curse by killing him. Unfortunately the servant who was asked to kill him gives him to a shepherd who in turn hands him over to his childless master. Oedipus is brought up in Corinth but unfortunately, he tries to run away from the same curse (fate) when he realizes that he is doomed to kill his father and marry his mother. In running away from fate, he fulfills that prophecy.

The theme of a play could be given in one word but ideally it is presented in sentence or statement. A play could be complex and it might be difficult to give the theme or the central idea in one word. However, you should realize that whether it is in one word or in one sentence, you must explain it further based on the play. You should also be in a position to identify other themes, if the play has other themes.

Usually the theme is identified after you must have read the entire play. Finally, theme is the controlling idea in a play which the reader extracts consciously as he reads the text. It could be literal or symbolic. It is that idea or message which the playwright wants to share with or convey to his audience. In most cases, the theme emerges after the exploration of the entire play. Some plays have more than one theme. The major one which stands out is the main theme while the others are called the sub-themes.

### **Subject Matter**

The subject matter is the topic of discussion in the play. It is easier to get the subject matter from the title of the play. Theme is the central idea of the play while the subject matter is the object of discussion from which the theme is extracted. It means therefore that the theme is subsumed in the subject matter. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, for instance, the subject matter is the fame of Sidi (the Jewel) a young and beautiful girl and her seduction by the Bale (the Lion) who is sixty two years old. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the theme is love but the subject matter is the marriage of Anansewa. From the two examples, we conclude that the subject matter is indeed the object of discussion which other events and incidents in a text or work help to highlight.

This is the statement the play makes about the social world. In most cases, plays treat common human problems and make statements that have universal validity or relevance for all ages. Each playwright treats any of these human problems from his own perspective to give it a touch of originality and uniqueness. This is the style.

### **Characterization**

Characters are the persons in a dramatic work. The playwright endows them with moral and dispositional qualities which are expressed (as discussed above) in their words and actions. The reasons for the character's action, his speech, his temperament constitute his motivation. In textual analysis, one could evaluate the character through the stage direction where some playwrights have some comments on the character's disposition, his age, his physical attributes, his mode of dressing and other information that could be found there.

The next thing is to evaluate his interactions with other characters through which you discover whether he is a flat or round character. A flat character remains unchanged in his outlook and dispositions from the beginning to the end but a round character could undergo a gradual or radical change which is brought about by events in the play. It is difficult to predict the actions of a round character because he is usually very close to real human beings.

Anything you write about a character must be contained in the text. You should therefore not infer, guess or suggest a characteristic moral disposition or physical attribute that cannot be identified in the text. For instance, you can rightly say that Baroka in *The Lion and the Jewel* is a crafty rogue who excels in self-indulgence. One of the characters said that about him and his action too in the scene where his current wife is pulling the hairs in his armpit and also in his seduction of Sidi. We have analysed the plays that are recommended for this course in subsequent units and we discussed some of the characters.

### **Setting**

Setting is the place or the time where or when the action of the play takes place. In textual analysis, setting is also discussed. Setting could be a tribe, a village a town or a country depending on the disposition of the playwright. In some plays like *Oedipus Rex*, *Arms and the Man*, *Hamlet* and many others, the playwrights mention specific towns/countries like Thebes, Bulgaria, and Denmark. However, in some other plays like *The Marriage of Anansewa*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, and *The Song of a Goat*, the setting of each play is identified through the names of characters or other landmarks. In *The Lion and the Jewel* for instance, the reference to 'sango' by some of the characters highlights the Yoruba background of the play. Setting in terms of time, period, or locale can be mentioned, implied or alluded to in the text.

### **Language**

Language seems to be the most essential technique in the analysis of any dramatic text. It is through language that the playwright communicates his ideas; so he manipulates it to suit his intention. Language could be in form of speech, gestures or other bodily signs/symbols. Dramatic language is not just an ordinary language because the playwright is compelled to incorporate descriptions about setting, character and the overall presentation of the story through the characters. The language must therefore be very economical, vivid and expressive. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, the language is concise but loaded with meaning. Let us look at the following exchange in which Teiresias sums up the misfortunes of King Oedipus.

Oedipus: Man, must you wrap up your words in riddles?

Teiresias: Where you not framed for skill for solving riddles?

Oedipus: You taunt me with the gift that is my greatest.

Teiresias: Your great misfortune and your ruin.

In the last line of this exchange, the Blind Seer states that by solving the riddles and becoming the king of Thebes, Oedipus paved the way for his misfortune, which is marrying his mother after having killed his father. Consequently, there is a plague in Thebes and this leads to the search for a solution. In the course of this search, Oedipus discovers his true identity and this leads to his ruin. Another good example of condensed language in Hamlet is Polonius' advice to his son, Laertes: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be / for loan often loses itself and friend/and borrowing dull that edge of husbandry".

So, in dramatic language, the dramatist must think in terms of the characteristics of the characters, their speeches, their actions and the environment in which they operate and incorporate them in language. This is important because unlike in prose, where the novelist has enough time and space to describe everything and this include probing into the inner beings of the character, the dramatist relies only on dialogue to explore characters, describe incident, create environment, atmosphere and mood. This is the reason why he pays attention to the diction.

Diction is the choice or selection of the words which forms the dialogue through which the playwright communicates his ideas to his audience. The diction could be simple or difficult. A play that has very simple diction invariably will have a simple and direct language so is said to be accessible to a wider audience. This is because more people will read and understand it. Also, when it is presented on stage, people will understand the story and absorb the message with ease. In a play with simple diction, the playwright uses familiar and simple words.

On the other hand, some plays are difficult to understand. They are usually filled with unfamiliar words, terms, and symbols. Such plays are said to be obscure and the playwright is said to be writing for a select audience. This is because many people will find it difficult to

understand and appreciate the play. The problem here is that if you do not understand a play, you would not enjoy it or be entertained by it.

You can read a simple play just once and enjoy the story but it will take at least a second reading for the story of an obscure play to be understood. For instance, you can read two plays by Wole Soyinka, *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Madmen and Specialists*. The former is very simple, direct and entertaining. It tells a story of a fake pastor who swindles people to make money. The latter is on the Nigerian civil war but you will have to read it several times to be able to decode the symbols used in it for you to understand the play.

## **Other Devices**

### **Imagery**

A playwright could employ literal or connotative language in his work. A literal language gives a direct meaning of the words while a connotative language gives more than one meaning to the word. The language here determines how we mentally visualize the object or situation. This is called imagery. It also shows the playwright's attitude towards a particular character or situation. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, for example, Baroka is referred to as a 'fox', a 'crafty rogue', 'wiry', 'goated', 'tougher than his sixty-two', these references help the reader to have a mental picture of Baroka. The image of a character and his mode of dressing as described in a stage-direction helps us, to a large extent, to evaluate the character's disposition, personality, and the attitude of the playwright towards that character.

### **Symbolism**

In everyday life, you come across symbols and even use them at times. Symbols are objects or things that communicate meaning or messages without using words for example, a cross or a bible symbolizes Christianity. It could be a character, an object, or an incident which represents an idea, a person, a quality, a profession or situation.

Symbolism is an artistic device through which the playwright uses factual language in a way that it deviates from its simple function of describing or recording but used to stand for or represent something else not directly named. This means, therefore, that in a play, you could have symbolic action, symbolic object and symbolic character.

### **Irony**

A playwright uses irony to add flavour to his story. Here, a playwright uses words or action to create certain kinds of discrepancy between appearance and reality; between what is said or done and what is meant or intended. The types are verbal irony, dramatic irony and situational irony.



## **Verbal Irony**

This is the simplest and commonest type of irony. It is a figure of speech where the word is the opposite of what is meant; for example, when he is a giant or the tallest man refers to a very short man.

## **Dramatic Irony**

Here, there is a contrast between what the character says or does and what the reader knows as the truth. If a speech is meant to be understood in one way by a certain character in a play but the audience understands it in a different way, the scenario becomes a dramatic irony. In other words, a character is under a delusion of a certain fact which has been overtaken by an intervening circumstance.

## **Situational Irony**

In irony of situation, the expectation does not come out in the way it is anticipated. It is a situation of appearance versus reality. The action of a character here is at variance with the consequences or result of the action.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Read and analyze one of the plays recommended for this course.
- ii. Discuss setting in any one of the plays set for this course.

# Sample analysis example 1

## OEDIPUS REX OR KING OEDIPUS BY SOPHOCLES

### INTRODUCTION

In this section, you will be introduced to a classical tragedy-Oedipus Rex. We will use this play to illustrate the Aristotelian elements of drama. The text is also called King Oedipus.

### Synopsis of the Play Oedipus Rex

In the city of Delphi, a son is born to King Laius. The oracle of Delphi reveals that this child is doomed to commit an abomination. He is to kill his father and marry his mother. The King and his wife are sad with this prophecy. Consequently, they take steps to avert its fulfillment. They drive a peg through his two ankles, give him to a shepherd to expose him at the hillside, apparently for him to die there.

The shepherd gives him to the servant of the King of Corinth, Polybus. This child grows up with them and takes them as his parents. One day he is told that he is not actually what he claims to be. He goes to the oracle to find out the truth. He is told he is fated to kill his father and marry his mother. He tries to defeat the oracle by running away. He resolves to stay out of Corinth until his parents are dead.

On his way, he meets an entourage and there is a quarrel over the right of way. He kills everybody except one person who escaped. The city he enters is besieged by a Sphinx who kills the citizens because they cannot answer a particular riddle. Oedipus solves the riddle and is made the king. Consequently, he marries the queen who, unknown to both of them, is his mother. He lives with her and they have children. The city is again besieged by a plague. The general belief is that the city is not clean, so it is being punished by the gods. They inquire from the oracle and they are told that the unknown assassin of the former king, Laius, is in their midst and unless he is discovered and punished, the plague would continue.

Oedipus sets out in search of the killer and eventually finds out that he is the killer. The queen tries in vain to stop the quest. She commits suicide as the reality dawns on her that she had married her own son. King Oedipus gouges out his two eyes and leaves Thebes with the children.

### Themes

The main theme of the play is fate or destiny. The play dramatizes the helplessness of man in the hands of the gods or in the hands of Fate. It upholds belief in destiny and the fact that what is destined to happen to anybody must happen to that person irrespective of what the person does.

Another theme of the play is man's search for identity. It shows that, sometimes, we are not what we think that we are. If we, therefore, decide to search, we might discover our true identities. In the play, Oedipus' search for his true parents leads him to kill his father and marry his mother while his search for the plague in his kingdom and the murderer of King Laius leads to his search for his true identity.

### **Plot**

The play has a single unified plot. It is presented like a detective play which is like an investigation into the cause of the plague. The play therefore commences as a search and proceeds as a search until the messenger from Corinth arrives. The events of the play run chronologically and causally from the beginning to the end. The incidents have causes and consequences (interdependence of incidents). Oedipus assures his subjects that he will solve their problems by ensuring that the killer of Laius is found and punished. He therefore sends Creon to the oracle to inquire and also sends for the seer, Teiresias. Creon returns with the news that the killer they seek is in their midst. The seer confirms this information and goes a step further out of provocation to accuse Oedipus of being the killer he seeks. The queen tries to refute the seer's claim and unwittingly tells Oedipus the story of his birth. However, this fact is further revealed as the messenger from Corinth arrives to inform Oedipus of the death of his father. He explains the circumstance that took Oedipus to Corinth. This circumstance is that Oedipus is not the prince of Corinth as he had hitherto believed. The truth is that the Oedipus was given to him by the shepherd who was asked to abandon the baby in the forest to die. He, the messenger, gave the baby to his master who was childless then.

Oedipus was then brought up and treated like a prince. Thus the arrival of the messenger provides a basis for revealing the true story. The shepherd corroborated his story and this leads to the resolution of the play. This section of the play is replete with dramatic ironies. It is ironical that the killer which the king seeks is himself. Try to identify other ironies in the play.

The play opens with a search. The first search is for the cause of the plague in Thebes. This leads to the search for a murderer and the search continues until the messenger from Corinth arrives with his news. The information from him and the accusation from the seer leads to another kind of search – the search for an identity. The revelations about the true identity of King Oedipus lead to the resolution of the play.

The plot is also ironic because Oedipus sets out to secure peace and tranquility in his kingdom by tracking the cause of the plague. He realizes that this can only be achieved through the discovery and punishment of the killer of King Laius. He becomes the killer he is searching for. The major ironic twist in the play is that, it is believed that the discovery of his true identity will lead to the solution of his problems. Unfortunately it becomes the beginning of his problems. It is also expected that the discovery of the murderer he is looking for will end the plague in the land but he leaves the city as a blind man who does not know if the plague ended or not. The play conforms to the Aristotelian plot structure of beginning, middle and end.

**Exposition** - The play opens with a problem. There is a plague in the land and the people are suffering.

**Complication** - Creon returns and tells him that the oracle says that the killer is in their midst. There is a conflict. He quarrels with Creon and the seer. The search for his identity introduces more complications.

**Climax** - The climax begins with the arrival of the messenger from Corinth and culminates in the revelation of his true identity.

**Discovery** - He discovers his true self and real parents.

**Reversal** - There is a reversal of fortune as a man who was once a famous king is brought down and expelled from the society he once ruled. The king leaves his city as a wandering blind beggar. In the catastrophe, the Queen hangs herself while the king blinds himself and goes on self-exile. The killer of Laius is found and punished, so the plague is expected to stop. Thus the conflicts are resolved.

## **Characterization**

The characters are consistent and well-motivated. Oedipus remains resolute and exhibits his bravery and arrogance throughout the play. This aspect of his character is manifested more at the end of the play when he gouges out his eyes. Only a brave man can inflict such pain on himself. Each character's action helps to advance the theme and propel the plot. For instance, the insistence of the king on the search for the killer of the late king sustains the play from the beginning to the end.

The chorus is used as a character. However, it speaks in an impersonal way. It therefore does not participate in the action. It makes statements or comments on man and the forces against him which he cannot understand. Sometimes it thinks aloud as it expresses its fears on a particular issue. A good example is when the messenger from Corinth arrives with the news that Polybus is dead. The chorus is apprehensive and wondered aloud. It feels

that if the gods have failed, then the whole system is destroyed. In the end, the gods did not fail. The truth is revealed and the chorus reviews the entire action. The chorus acts as the interpreter of events in the play.

Jocasta is an obedient wife. She obeys her husband as she agrees to hand over her son to be killed. She marries Oedipus apparently in obedience to the laws of the land. She is encountered briefly as she pleads with her husband to stop the search. Her husband refuses to stop the search and she does not confront him, instead she leaves quietly to hang herself.

### **Diction**

The language is in verse. It is condensed but accessible. The language is used to delineate characters. For instance, Oedipus speaks with the authority and arrogance of a king. The words are well chosen to reveal both characters and incidents. The Blind Seer also speaks with the authority of someone who possesses some supernatural powers. Other characters speak in simple language as people speaking before their king.

### **Music**

There is an alternation of dialogue and songs. The chorus sings part of its lines and dances in accompaniment of the song. The larger part of the play in which the chorus sings is called the choral song or the strophe. The practice is that as they sing the strophe, they dance. The movement from right to left is called the anti-strophe.

### **Spectacle**

The stylized acting, the costume and make-up, and the dance of the chorus, all contribute to the spectacle of the play.

### **Tragic Hero/Tragic Flaw**

Oedipus is a typical classical tragic hero. He is of a noble birth. Even when circumstance would have forced him to the lower class, he leaves Corinth, arrives at Thebes and is made the king. His tragic flaw is arrogance and irascibility. In arrogance, he decides to outwit the gods by running away from Corinth. In arrogance, he refuses to concede the right of way to king Laius and his men. In arrogance, he challenges both Creon and Teiresias. In arrogance, he refuses to listen to a plea, to stop the quest, from Jocasta. In arrogance he refuses to ask for mercy or any other solution but gouges his eyes and leaves the city. He is also temperamental which is why he kills King Laius and his men. He also threatens to deal with Creon and Teiresias. He pursues the goal he believes in to its logical conclusion even to the detriment of his life.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

i. What is the thematic concern of Oedipus Rex

- ii. Oedipus is doomed to kill his father and marry his mother. Discuss.
- iii. Describe King Oedipus as a tragic hero
- iv. What is the distinctive feature of the plot of Oedipus Rex?

## CONCLUSION

Oedipus Rex is a good example of an ideal classical play that is still relevant in our own times. It meets the Aristotelean postulations on tragedy. It contains a single integral plot which is presented in one single setting within a very short period of time. It presents the story of how Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. The setting is in front of the palace. To maintain this single setting, indoor actions and violence are reported. For instance Jocasta's hanging of herself is reported and not presented on stage. Oedipus, the tragic hero, is a king who is not preeminently good, virtuous or vicious but he commits an error of judgment. Towards the end of the play, he discovers the truth about himself and his fortune reverses from good to bad. His catastrophe is caused by his tragic flaw which is arrogance.

## Sample analysis 2

### DEATH OF A SALESMAN BY ARTHUR MILLER

#### INTRODUCTION

This section is concerned with the study of a play with a peculiar technique. In the play, Arthur Miller challenged the Aristotelian concept of tragedy. He discarded the notion that tragedy befalls only the people from the upper class of the society. He created the tragedy of the common man through the character of Willy Loman.

#### Synopsis

The play presents the story of Willy Loman, a Salesman. In his younger days he was well-liked and popular, at least he believed so. He struggles to maintain his family. He lives a false life and this affects the way he brings up his children. He talks of the American Dream but does not live up to it. He inculcates this attitude in his children and they grow up believing to be what they are not. He makes them believe that they are excelling in every thing when in actual sense they are not. Biff failed Mathematics and does not retake it. Consequently, he is unable to graduate from high school. The reason for his refusal to retake the subject is known only to him and his father (he met his father with a prostitute in a hotel room shortly before the exams) as shown in one of the flashbacks. Consequently, he is demoralized and despises his father. He is not qualified for any profession. To make matters worse, he steals himself out of every opportunity he has for employment. Yet, his father refuses to acknowledge these facts and

flatters and encourages him to aspire to greater heights when it is clear that he is not qualified for those higher positions.

Linda, Loman's wife, knows that her husband is living a false life but refuses to confront him in order not to deflate his ego which is very important to him as a man. She tries to manage whatever her husband provides for her without complaint. She mends her old stockings always. So when Biff meets a woman with new stockings given to her by his father, he hated his father and carries this hatred throughout the play.

Willy Loman works in a company as a salesman for thirty years. Unfortunately, he is sacked when the company feels that he is no longer productive due to old age. He is not compensated adequately so he could not take care of himself in retirement and old age. His children are loafers so cannot take care of him. He still does not realize that he cannot sell the way he used to sell and that he is not well-liked. He goes to his old customers but tragically nobody notices him. He goes back to the company but his new boss, (the son of his old boss) prefers to listen to machine instead of to Loman.

Loman does not give good example for his children. He refuses to tell his wife that he lost his job and continues borrowing money to keep his family and could leave any positive legacy for them. They grow up as failures while he gets frustrated. He breaks down physically, emotionally and psychologically. He talks to himself more often.

Suicide becomes inevitable. He attempts to take his life in the house but Linda unobtrusively prevents it. Later he dies in an accident in his car. It is believed that he killed himself deliberately and made it look like an accident. His funeral is very solemn and only members of his family and one of his friends and son are present.

### **Theme**

The theme of the play is misplaced priorities. The play makes a crucial statement on the economic situation in the then American society where the social security was grossly inadequate. It was a society that had no retirement provision for the working class. The play highlights the situation in the society where industries use and dump their employees

and leave them with nothing to fall back on when they retire. This play is said to have influenced the industrial revolution in America. In fact, it is believed that the entire American industrial sector was reorganized after the production of the play. Loman spent the greater part of his life working as a salesman in a company and he is discarded like an orange peel when he is no longer active. Miller, in this play suggests that establishments should make provisions for their staff to be comfortable in their later years.

A man should, as much as possible, be realistic with himself and the world around him. Willy Loman looked forward to his funeral which will be attended by many people because according to him he is well-liked. Ironically, only members of his family plus his steadfast friend Charley with his son, Bernard, attended the funeral.

The play shows that there is no short-cut to survival especially in the case of dignity. Willy Loman lives a life of falsehood and believes in the lies he tells his children and himself. Consequently, he fails as a professional, as a father, and as a husband. He refuses to heed Charley's advice. Loman spends his life fighting for dignity, recognition, self-worth and against being reduced to the level of an imbecile in his capitalist society and ends up committing suicide.

## **Plot**

This play has a peculiar plot structure. Although the present events in the play run chronologically and sequentially from the beginning to the end, there are interruptions from thoughts in Loman's head. The action of the play covers Loman's experiences one late evening through to the next day. However, these events are interwoven with the events in the past which sometimes overlap with the present. In some cases, he talks to a character in the present in one line and in the next line he talks to another character from the past.

Miller uses the expressionistic technique to achieve this in such a way that the illusion of reality is not destroyed. He uses this technique to superimpose Willy's consciousness in the play. He realizes the difficulties inherent in this type of technique which is easily realizable in the novel where the novelist has the time and space to describe clearly what goes on in a character's head. Miller overcomes this handicap through detailed stage directions throughout the play. One of the important ones is that at the beginning of the play, where there is a dual setting. The elevations and their specifications are given in details in the stage direction. He also mentions specifically that the apron should serve as the locale for Willy's imaginings and of the city scenes involving Loman.

You will observe that these events in his head are not presented chronologically as in flashbacks but as the need for each recollection arises in relation to the action of the play.

## **Characterization**

Miller utilizes realistic characters. You can feel Willy Loman's frustrations and fears as he struggles through life. The playwright has been able to create the right characters to dramatize his story. He creates Charley as a foil to Willy. Charley is more realistic and cool headed. He realizes the need for industry and inculcates same in his son, Bernard.



Consequently, while Bernard succeeds in life, Loman's sons fail because they got the wrong values from their father. Willy deceives himself, tells lies to himself, his wife, his friend and his wife. His children continue with the same self-deceit and lies. They know that they are deceiving themselves but seem incapacitated in confronting themselves with the truth or in making an effort to change. However, Biff who is more rational realizes it and faces himself after his encounter with Oliver:

Biff: [breathlessly] I did a terrible thing today, Hap. It's been the strangest day I ever went through. I'm all numb, I swear.

Happy: You mean he wouldn't see you?

Biff: Well I waited six hours for him, see? All day. Kept sending my name in. Even tried to date his secretary so she'd get me to him, but no soap.

Happy: Because you're not showin' the old confidence, Biff. He remembered you?

Biff: [stopping Happy with a gesture]: Finally, about five o' clock, he comes out. Didn't remember who I was or anything. I felt like such an idiot, Hap.

Happy: Did you tell him about my Florida idea?

Biff: He walked away. I saw him for one minute. I got so mad I could have torn the walls down! How the hell did I get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I've been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look and – I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We've been living in a dream for fifteen years. I was a shipping clerk. (82)

Eventually he confronts his father with the truth as he insists that he never got anywhere because his father made him to be so arrogant that he could not stand take orders from anybody (104). His brother Happy continues with his life of illusion. Linda is presented as an understanding wife. She supports her husband and makes him feel wanted. She encourages her children in vain to do the same. She loves her husband so much that he does not want their children to hurt him. She knows that her husband is living in a dream world but does not confront him with the truth so as not to deflate his ego even when she finds out that he attempted suicide. The creation of Linda as a devoted wife is deliberate because it will not be proper for everybody in the family to abandon him.

The playwright's dramatic incursions into the mind of Willy Loman give us an insight into his mental state at any given time. Miller presents these images from his mind and superimposes them on the present action. In spite of this montage, Miller is able to structure the play in such a way that Willy comes out as a realistic sane man and not as a lunatic who talks to himself.

## Language

There is no effort by the playwright to use an elevated poetic language characteristic of classical tragedy. He uses the everyday language of the contemporary man. Consequently, slang and other forms of language are used freely as can be seen in this conversation between Willy and Howard.

Howard: Yeah, but Willy, see I...

Willy: I tell ya why, Howard. The kids are all grown up, y'know.

I don't need much money any more. If I could take home  
– well, sixty-five dollars a week, I could swing it....

Howard: I appreciate that, Willy, but there just isn't a spot here for you. If I had a spot, I'd slam you right in, but I just don't have a single solitary spot... it's business, kid, and everybody's gotta pull his own weight. (62)

Music is used to enhance the mood and define locale sometimes. For instance the music from the flute helps to highlight Loman's solitary funeral and the solemnity of the occasion at the end of the play.

## Tragic Hero and Tragic Flaw

Usually, a hero is associated with noble deeds but Loman is an unsuccessful salesman; what then qualifies him as a hero? In the portrayal of this character, the playwright calls for a redefinition of tragedy and tragic hero in modern times. According to him, since kings and princes are no longer available, tragedy should be based on the heart and spirit of the common man. He therefore created Loman in his daily struggles to earn a living as every other man in the society. He is not a character of high social status but he struggles to maintain his family.

Despite the obstacles, he tries to secure his rightful position in the society, at least to maintain his conceived image of himself. In this struggle, he is willing to throw in all that he has into the contest and this makes him a hero. He pursues his set goal to its logical conclusion even to the extent of losing his life.

Tragedy is the consequence of a man's compulsion to evaluate himself justly and the action reveals a tragic flaw in the tragic hero. This failing, according to Miller, is not peculiar to noble characters alone. This flaw is usually as a result of inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, to the image of his rightful status. So, a common man who is ready to lay down his life to secure his sense of personal dignity is also a tragic hero.

Loman is neither too vicious nor too virtuous. He is a hero because of his brave attempt to confront negative forces entrenched in the capitalist society. This society discards him like an orange peel once he is no longer strong and useful to the society. The society at this point no longer regards him as a man. However, he does not relent but fights on till the end. We do not blame the society entirely for his failure. He has his own fault which is his tragic flaw. He is a dreamer. He refuses to face reality and keeps on believing that he is well-liked by everybody. Unfortunately, he dies and is buried as Mr. Nobody.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Discuss the unique nature of the plot of the play.
2. What is the tragedy of the common man?

### **CONCLUSION**

Arthur Miller's major contribution to modern drama is his elevation of the common man to the status of a tragic hero. This is a deviation from the earlier conventions of drawing the hero from the noble class. The hero's fate is no longer determined by his personality.

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