
THE DRAMATIC ART AND EXECUTION

G.Suneetha,

M.Phil, Research Scholar,
Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur,
Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract:

This paper shows the way for drama and fiction. A play has a plot, characters, dialogues, an atmosphere, and an outlook on life much as a novel has but it is as a rule intended to be performed in public, not read in private. The author, however, has to work with a number of collaborators, all of whom have to be taken into account: the audience, the actors, the producer, the scene-painter, the dressmaker, the musician, the electrician, and many others. He should take into account prices and mechanical and physical limitations. All drama sets forth a haul or a conflict. In tragedy the theme is dark and serious; comedy it is light and gay, promising a happy ending. Shakespeare put these words into the mouth of his character, but as a romantic poet, he did not aim at a realistic portrayal of man and manners or of life as it is actually lived. He enlarged or compressed as suited his purpose – that of the professional dramatist, writing in accordance with the taste of his times for lofty language and grandeur of conception. Ben Jonson, indeed, attempted "to show an image of times", employing for that purpose "language such as men do use", but perhaps for that very reason, he made less appeal to later generations. The modern realistic drama has produced many works that achieved great and deserved success in their own day, yet when they have been revived after a period of only twenty years they have seemed merely dull and outmoded.

Keywords: Drama, Fiction, Dramatist, History, Shakespeare etc

Drama and fiction

Drama presents fiction or fact in the form that could be acted before an audience. A play has a plot, characters, dialogues, an atmosphere, and an outlook on life much as a novel has but it is as a rule intended to be performed in public, not read in private. Its full qualities are only revealed on the stage. A novel is self-contained. It is enjoyed while not recourse to any external accent. It carries all its meaning within itself. So do all other forms of

literature, both those that are subjective and those that have a story to tell like the epic and the ballad.

The management of the material of the drama is, consequently, different from that of the novel. While the latter can be as long as the author pleases, a play must deliver its whole message within very few hours. For that purpose, it has to exercise great economy in the handling of the plot and the delineation of character, in both of which all superfluous detail must be omitted. Every detail must bring together the effect that limits. The novelist labours under no such handicap. He can be long-winged or brief, the minute or general, as he thinks fit, provided he can be sure of holding the attention of his reader.

The playwright, however, has to work with a number of collaborators, all of whom have to be taken into account: the audience, the actors, the producer, the scene-painter, the dressmaker, the musician, the electrician, and many others. He has got to think about prices and mechanical and physical limitations. To take but one instance, he cannot make one role unduly long, for that would put an undue strain on a single actor, night and night, and would be monotonous for the audience. His play, in short, will not be likely to be produced unless it conforms to a great many material requirements which the novelist is free to ignore. It has often been said that when a novel is written, it is finished, but when a play has been written, the worst difficulties still lie ahead.

The novelist, too, can sometimes interrupt his story and come forward himself to explain his purpose. Though this is hardly ever done nowadays, it was quite a common practice with older writers, such as Thackeray.

The playwright doesn't address his audience directly during this way; he speaks through his characters. They may never, so far as anyone can discover, express his own opinions, as in the case of Shakespeare and the other Elizabethans. On the other hand, they may, as in the plays of Shaw or Galsworthy, put forward with special force and brilliance the author's personal views on the social and political questions of every kind.

Even then, the playwright is usually speaking through a mouthpiece, never in his own person. The structure of the play. All drama sets forth a retardant or a conflict. In tragedy the theme is dark and serious; comedy it is light and gay, promising a happy ending. The structure is the same in both the cases. A play requires an Exposition to explain the circumstances or the situation from which the action is to take its course; a Complication (or rising action), during which it progresses or grows more involved; a Climax (or crisis), when it takes a turn for the better or worse (according as the play is a comedy or a tragedy);

a Denouement (or Falling Action), which unravels the complication; and a Solution (in a comedy) or Catastrophe (in a tragedy) that decides the fate of its characters. On a five-act play the exposition occupies the first actor so; the Climax or the Crisis a part of the third act, the fourth act, and a part of the fifth; and the Solution or Catastrophe and the rest of the fifth act. In shorter plays, each phrase is proportionately reduced.

The typical Elizabethan drama, following the Senecan tragedy, was divided into five acts, each comprising a number of scenes. The stage is simple – a mere platform – and the stage contrivances but few, the scenes followed each other in quick succession, changes being indicated only by a notice on a board. Elaborate scenery and costume came very much lately, and possible some splendid production of famous plays. But the five-act poetic drama went out of favour in course of time, and for the purpose of the modern dramatist three acts provided to be sufficient. If the play was little short, a one-act piece of a light nature was performed as a "curtain raiser". Changing social and economic conditions caused performances to be shorter, and in the English theatre of today, the program is usually limited to a single play lasting less than three hours. Shakespeare's longer play has, of course, to be abridged for modern purposes, as indeed they were even in the eighteenth century.

Realism and romance

But all art is directly or indirectly coloured by the artist's personality, and the drama does not promise to be entirely faithful to fact.

It is a portrait, not a photograph; aversion, not a copy. It is the dramatist's "criticism of life." His verdict upon men and manners, and often suggests what is true by means of the false. A great play is the product of imagination working upon experience and observation, whatever the theme may be. The method may be romantic, lifting the language and characters into the realm of the poetry, or it may be realistic, keeping close to prosaic, but not less dramatic, fact. Hamlet summed up the principles in the drama, "whose end", he said, "is to hold, as it were, the mirror, up to nature; to show the virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and the body of the time his form and pressure." Shakespeare put these words into the mouth of his character, but as a romantic poet, he did not aim at a realistic portrayal of man and manners or of life as it is actually lived. He enlarged or compressed as suited his purpose – that of the professional dramatist, writing in accordance with the taste of his times for lofty language and grandeur of conception. Folly in his hands is more consistently foolish than ever it is in life and nobility of such a quality as is rarely met with. Ben Jonson,

indeed, attempted "to show an image of times", employing for that purpose "language such as men do use", but perhaps for that very reason, he made less appeal to later generations. Realism trend to fade with the conditions it represents, because it is true to them only. The romantic drama deals with what is common to all times in a style that will always be admired for its own beauties. The modern realistic drama has produced many works that achieved great and deserved success in their own day, yet when they have been revived after a period of only twenty years they have seemed merely dull and outmoded.

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