



UNIVERSITAS NEGERI YOGYAKARTA
FAKULTAS BAHASA DAN SENI

SILABUS
MATA KULIAH : Intoduction to Drama

FRM/FBS/19-00

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Hal.

Fakultas	: Bahasa dan Seni	
Program Studi	: Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris	
Mata Kuliah & Kode	: Introduction to Drama	Kode:
Jumlah SKS	: Teori 2 SKS Praktik : - SKS	
Semester	: 4 (EMPAT)	
Mata Kuliah Prasyarat & Kode	: -	
Dosen	: _____	

I. DESCRIPTION

This compulsory course provides students with the opportunity to explore the contents found in plays with emphasis laid on English and American works. To arrive at this objective, therefore, focuses on analysis on the elements of plays are given attention. Based on the topics to be covered in the whole semester, students are expected to produce individual text analysis of the texts provided. Students' learning is assessed through mid-term and final paper, assignments, and class participation.

II. AIMS

- At the end of this course students are expected to have acquired:
- ability to analyze the elements of plays found in English and American works listed on the syllabus.
 - positive attitudes to literary interpretation

III. PROGRESSION OF THE COURSE

Minggu Ke	Pokok Bahasan	Waktu
1	Course Orientation	100 minutes
2	The Dramatic Vision: An overview Reading Material: <i>The Show Must Go On</i> (Richard A. Via)	100 minutes

3	How to Understand Drama Reading Material: Lucille Fletcher's <i>Sorry, Wrong Number</i>	100 minutes
4	How to Analyze Drama	100 minutes
5	The Dramatic Nature, Language and Rhetoric Reading Material: <i>Triffles</i> (Susan Glaspell)	100 minutes
6-7	Characters Reading material: <i>Florence</i> (Alice Childress)	200 minutes
8	Mid-term Test	
9	Action, Conflict, and Plot	100 minutes
10	Further Dimensions and Devices Reading Material: <i>A Woman of No Importance</i> by Oscar Wilde	100 minutes
11	Theme Reading Material: <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Lorraine Hunsberry)	100 minutes
12-13	Tragedy Reading Material: Arthur Miller's <i>Death of a Salesman</i>	200 minutes
14-15	Comedy Reading material: <i>A man who came to dinner</i>	200 minutes
16	Final Test	

IV. REFERENSI/ SUMBER BAHAN

A. Wajib : -Handout

B. Anjuran : Reaske, Christopher Russel. 1966.*Analyze Drama*. Monarch Press: New York

V. EVALUASI

No	Komponen Evaluasi	Bobot (%)
1	Partisipasi Kuliah	20%
2	Tugas-tugas	20%
3	Ujian Tengah Semester	30%
4	Ujian Semester	30%
Jumlah		100%

CHAPTER I

THE DRAMATIC VISION: AN OVERVIEW

A. Drama as Literature

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

B. History of Drama

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

1. The Beginnings

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

a. Greek Tragedy

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

b. Greek Comedy

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

2. Drama in the Middle Age

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

3. Morality Plays and Interludes

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

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

4. Elizabethan Drama

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

5. Restoration & 18th Century Drama

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

6. The 17th Century Drama

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

7. The 18th Century Drama

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

8. Domestic Tragedies

Domestic tragedies (bourgeois drama) are based on the lives of common, ordinary people. In the eighteenth century domestic tragedy reappeared largely as a compensatory reaction against the heroic plays of classical tragedies.

All in all, we should try to remember that drama develops out of the first pagan celebrations of the rites of Dionysius. The drama follows the original polarization of the emotions into tragedy and comedy but always finds itself forced into hybridized forms. Our understanding of the history of the development of drama serves as a general background of information on the one hand and as a means of directing attention to the spoken aspects of drama on the other.

C. Assignment

1. Discuss the following questions with your partner.
 - a. How can you define drama based on your own understanding?
 - b. How can you explain about the history of drama by using your own scheme?
2. Reading assignment: *The Show Must Go On* by Richard A. Via
 1. What kind of play does *The Show Must Go On* belong to?
 2. Mention the characteristics of drama that you can find in *The Show Must Go On*

CHAPTER II

HOW TO UNDERSTAND DRAMA

It is clear from our brief survey of the history of drama that drama is written to be spoken. We know nothing about the characters except what we are told about them. That is, there is no narration or description in drama. Thus, the playwright automatically must present his ideas and his pictures of the characters almost entirely through dialogue and action. The audience, therefore, can directly observe the ways in which characters are influenced and changed by events and by other characters. However, in a certain way, drama has much in common with the other genres of literature. As with fiction, drama focuses on one or a few major characters that enjoy success or endure failure as they face challenges and deal with other characters. In view of that, to be able to understand drama, it must be read eventually. Due to its specific characteristics, some suggestions are given to have a better understanding in a play.

A. How Do You Read A Play?

As the nature of drama is quite different from that of fiction or poetry, to read it, of course, needs special awareness. Hence, to understand the meaning embedded in drama, you should stick to the following steps:

1. Listen to the lines!

It means that you should read the dialogue as you would expect to hear it spoken. Thus, you need to be able to imagine in what kind of intonation the sentence is spoken.

This is one fine example to be discussed:

“Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to live you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be...” (Ibsen’ *Doll’s House*)

Can you detect the mixture of tenderness & regret in these words?

2. Visualize the scene!

Meaning that you need to picture in your mind what the stage looks like so that you can grasp the important details related to, for example, the setting of the play. In so doing, you will be able to get more obvious images about what happens in the play. Here, you need to explore your imagination as much as possible. For example, In Tennessee William's *Street Car Named Desire*, you can imagine how most scenes describe rooms in a cheap apartment in a slum area, or in Childress' *Florence* you can imagine how the scenes happen in a railway station's waiting room.

3. Envision the action!

In understanding a drama text you also need to observe the stage direction and pay attention to the importance of movement, gesture, and setting in the performance of a play. Thus, you need to take notice of the stage direction in the text.

Exercise:

Please identify the emotions or the moods embedded in the following expressions

- 1) "I try but it's really difficult to understand you people. However...I keep trying" (Childress' *Florence*)
- 2) "Do not take them from me, ever!" (Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*)
- 3) "The trouble is he's lazy, goddammit!" (Miller's *Death of a Salesman*)
- 4) "Oh, Walter.... (Softly.) Honey, why can't you stop fighting me?" (Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*)
- 5) "Well, women are used to worrying over trifles" (Glaspell's *Trifles*)

B. How to make intonation happen correctly?

Giving the right intonation when you read a dialogue or a sentence in a drama text is a way of interpreting it. In so doing, you must get involved in the situation and understand exactly what is happening in the text. Therefore, you can ask the following questions to yourself:

- Why do I say this line?
- What do I expect the other person to do when I say this line?
- How will the other person react?
- What is my feeling in this situation?
- What is my emotion?

If you can answer those questions and, thus, know exactly what you are doing and why you are saying the line, stress will eventually hit in the right place.

C. Assignment

Read Lucille Fletcher's *Sorry, Wrong Number*. Find some interesting dialogues and try to give them the right intonation by acting it out in front of your friends.

CHAPTER III

HOW TO ANALYZE DRAMA

There are important things need to be done previously in analyzing drama that is defining the play and describing its elements. By doing this one can really grasp the core idea related to what is really happening in the play.

A. Defining the Play

As there are many different kinds of drama, it is only logical that we begin our analysis of a play with an extended definition. This does not simply mean to say that we point out that the play is a comedy or a tragedy, but rather that we attempt to describe accurately the particular world of a particular play. We should try to think of all the dimensions of any drama and then briefly describe the way these dimensions are discovered in a particular drama. In defining a play we can do the following.

1. Describing the World of Drama

This is the most essential task of a student in a drama class: to explain and describe the world of the play. We can take Arthur Miller's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Death of a Salesman*, and begin our definition of the play by mentioning that it is a dark drama which illustrates the despair of an unsuccessful human being. From beginning to end, Miller takes the audience into a very somber world possessed by the main character Willy Loman. As Loman relives his life constantly, he almost ceases to live at all, and his final suicide only magnifies the kind of lifeless world in which he has lived. Thus, we can say that the world of the play is dark and dreary: there is much anxiety and little hope. Miller has presented a world intentionally miserable and unsatisfying, and at the same time meaningful.

2. Describing the Kind of Play

We have to recognize the importance of placing a play in the generic sense. It is important to explain in the beginning of any analysis that the play does belong to the type known as this or that. Then we may even want to note that the play accordingly makes use of certain conventions common to this kind of play. For example, if it is a heroic play we can notice that the hero is typically a great lover and warrior, and like so many heroes of heroic plays is torn between love and duty. In

other words, the process of defining the play- which is how every analysis of every play should start- is aided by reference to the kind of play and the conventions of that kind of play. In this case we can also note the expected conventions of it and the extent to which the playwright makes use of them.

3. Describing the Physical World of the Play

It would be pointless to enter immediately into a discussion of the play without some brief explanation of the physical world in which it takes place. This means, first of all, explaining the location. Where does the action take place? Do we move from one part of the world to another as in *Antony and Cleopatra* or do we stay in one home almost the whole time as in *Death of a Salesman*? If the location has some symbolic or historical significance, this should be explained at the beginning.

Furthermore, we also need to denote the time of day. What is the length of the play? Are there intervals of time between scenes? Acts? Does the whole play take place in the classically specified twenty-four-hour period?

In so doing, by placing the play in time and space, we are clarifying the larger world with which the playwright is concerned, that is, the world of action and character. If we did not comment on the location and the passage of time of the play, we would assume too much in our reading.

B. Describing the Elements of Drama

The major literary aspects of drama are the text, language, characters, plot, structure, point of view, tone, symbolism, and theme or meaning. In analyzing drama we need to understand each of these. Thus, you can determine, for example, one dominating idea embedded in the play; find out the major as well as the minor characters, their roles, and the relationships among them; reveal some sort of correlation between the action and the theme by asking, for example why certain events are more important than others; discover how diction, figurative language, imagery patterns, and even logic are used in the play. Symbolism can also be significant ideas when analyzing dramas as symbolism may give us the core meaning of the story or determine our deep understanding of it. Each of the elements of drama will be described further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE DRAMATIC NATURE, LANGUAGE AND RHETORIC

The understanding on the dramatic nature, language and rhetoric will help us understand more the specific characteristics of drama. We can also see by examining these features that there many aspects in drama which need to be noticed and emphasized. Thus, the explanation of each is praiseworthy.

A. The Nature of Drama

One notable uniqueness in drama is related to the fact that it has two kinds of audience: those who read the manuscript and those who watch the performance. Each of this type of audience needs specific attitudes and knowledge to be able to enjoy a play either as a text or as a performance. Thus, defining the nature of drama means the revelation of the text as well as the performance. Both are interesting to discuss.

1. The Text

The text of a play is the printed (or handwritten) play. As there is no narration or description in drama, its most notable features are dialogue, monologue, and stage directions. By understanding this, we can study the written language of a play in order to arrive at certain conclusions regarding the play's artistic values, which must be examined easily through reading the play.

- Dialogue is the conversation of two or more characters.
- A monologue is spoken by a single character that is usually alone onstage.
- Stage directions are the playwright's instructions about facial and vocal expression, movement and action, gesture and body language, stage appearance, lighting, and similar matters.

The three aspects mentioned above play important roles in delivering the actions and events in the play

2. The Performance

In drama performance, the audience must be wiling to accept certain things in the imagination. For example, if several years pass between one act and the next while the curtain has been lowered for only ten minutes, the playgoer must accept the

passing of time. The audience must also accept the fact that when one character whispers to another, it must be loud enough for everyone in the theater to hear; while it should also be noted that the so-called “asides” which the other characters are not supposed to hear are obviously delivered in loud enough voices for them to hear. Those are called **dramatic conventions**, which the audience has to keep in mind to help them visualize mentally the way the play works when performed on stage.

B. Language, Imagery, and Style

The language, imagery, and style used by the dramatist may convey intimate details about the characters’ lives and their deepest thoughts such as their loves, hatreds, hopes, and plans. To bring such revelations before the audience, dramatists employ words that have wide-ranging connotations and that acquire many layers of meaning. They also make sure that the words of their characters fit the circumstances, the time, and the place of the play. For example, Miller’s Willy Loman speaks the language of modern America, and Shakespeare’s Hamlet speaks Elizabethan blank verse. Besides, dramatists employ accents, dialects, idiom, or jargon to indicate character traits. For example, the gravediggers in Hamlet speak in an English lower-class dialect that distinguishes them from the aristocratic characters in the play.

The words used by the characters also define the relationships within the play. This is because the language used by a particular character when talking to one person in the play will be altogether different from the language he uses when talking to another character. For example, the way in which Othello talks to Cassio defines the relationship between them as one existing between commanding officer and subordinate officer, while the way in which Othello talks to his new bride defines his marriage relationship. As we see the different kinds of language employed by the same character throughout the play, we are led both to an understanding of the rounded personality of that character and to an understanding of the relationships he has with other characters.

Certain aspects such as a simile (in which we have a literally presented analogy between two things introduced by “like” or “as”), a metaphor (in which we have an implied analogy between two things) are designed to draw our attention to certain characteristics of one thing through an association of that thing with other things. Often we will find in drama the alternation of light and darkness. Here images support certain moral values, as light tends to become associated with goodness and

darkness associated with evil. Images are designed to reinforce characterization and meaning and as certain kinds of images are repeated we can often talk about patterns of imagery. In general, imagery is more commonly found in tragedy rather than in comedy: comedy often relies more heavily on social statement than on imagery for supporting meaning. In addition, playwrights often use figurative language- they explain their ideas by the use of analogies which can be presented in different ways. There are countless kinds of figures of speech such as allegory, alliteration, personification, paradox, etc.

C. Assignment:

Read Susan Glaspell's *Triffles*

1. Define the world of drama in this play
2. Define the language, imagery and style employed in this play

CHAPTER V

CHARACTERS

As we have noted in the introduction that there is no narration and description in drama, it necessarily focuses on its characters, who are persons the playwright creates to embody the play's actions, ideas, and attitudes. The only descriptions of a character in a play are those made by other characters. Thus, characters speak about each other and characters speak about themselves.

A. Motivation

We learn a great deal about the characters in a play by closely observing their actions. How do they behave in different situations? How do they behave from one another in their behavior when sharing the same situation? How does the action translate into the theme? By answering those questions we attempt to analyze the characters in terms of their action. As characters usually do things for certain reasons, we as critics have every right and duty to analyze character motivation. A few of the most common motivations are as follows.

1. Hope for reward

A character has desires to bring happiness and prosperity to himself or to those whom he loves. This is reflected for example in the character of Walter Lee in Hunsberry's *Raisin in the Sun*. Here, Walter Lee is willing to do anything such as risking his father's insurance money in a liquor store as he really wants to bring prosperity and wealth to his family.

2. Love

A character is motivated to do a certain action because of the love which he has, the love which he wants, or the love that someone has for him, and also his love to himself. This is well described, for example, in Ibsen's *Ghosts*. Here, Mrs. Alving, the mother, sacrifices herself to be away of her beloved son in order to give a better life for him.

3. Fear of failure

A character is motivated to do a certain action because he fears that he will be crushed if he does not. It can also because he has been threatened with death or torture if he does not do as he has been told. This motivation is possessed by the character

Blanch in *A Street Car Named Desire*. She tells lies to her sister in order to gain her sister's sympathy toward her and if she tells the whole truth she thinks that her sister will leave her.

4. Religious feelings

A character acts out of deep feelings and convictions that he is acting as God so directs. In *A Raisin in the Sun* this motivation is well represented by Lena Younger as she believes that every conduct should be done in the name of God.

5. Revenge

The character usually is willing to lose his own life if necessary, as long as he is able to murder someone who has wronged him. In *Hamlet* it will be very easy for us to find such motivation.

6. Greed

This is a particular kind of motivation in the category of hope for reward which becomes an outstanding motive in many plays. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* affords a good example of a play in which greed operates as a central motive.

7. Jealousy

It is a kind of motive connecting to both love and the fear of failure. Jealousy operates as one of the strongest motives in all drama. Shakespeare's *Othello* is perhaps the most frequently cited example of a play in which the central character is motivated to action by way of his jealousy.

B. Types of Characters

Below are the types of characters that can be found in a play:

1. Protagonist: the main or central character in a narrative. It usually initiates the main action in a story.
2. Antagonist: The most significant character or force that opposes the protagonist.
3. Antihero: A protagonist who is lacking of the qualities attributed to a hero. It may be a kind of modern form of characterization, a satiric or realistic commentary on traditional portrayals of idealized heroes.
4. Flat Characters: They stay the same throughout the story. There are no changes.

5. Round Characters: A complex character who is presented in depth and detail in a narrative. They change significantly and most often are the central characters in a narrative.
6. Confidante: the hero's friend whose function is to give the hero someone in whom to confide on stage, thus allowing the audience to know his true feeling.

C. Devices of Characterization

Every dramatist has many various methods of characterization. Some of these devices are as follows.

1. The appearance of the character

In the prologue or in the stage directions the dramatist often describes the character in the physical sense. In this we can learn what the character looks like and perhaps how he dresses, whether he is attractive or unattractive, old or young, etc.

2. Asides and soliloquies

Aside is a remark or story in a speech or text which is not part of the main subject, while soliloquy is a speech in a play which the character speaks to him or herself or to the people watching rather than to the other characters. Both can make us understand the characters best. Here, they are telling the audience of their specific characteristics: if they are villains, they usually explain their evil intentions or cruel hopes; if they are lovers, they offer us poetic statements of affection; if they are heroes torn between love and duty, they tell us about his conflicts and his resulting pain. The use of soliloquies and asides is one of the most expert devices of characterization.

3. Dialogue between characters

Not only does the language of the character speaking alone characterize him, but his language when speaking to others also describes his personality.

4. Hidden narration

It is having one character in a play narrate something about another character as it is impossible for a dramatist to give his direct comment.

5. Language

The language of a character is extremely central to his personality attributes. Thus, in order to know more about a character the way he speaks and the expressions he uses

should always be our first concern. No doubt this is the most important aspect of characterization.

6. Character in action

As the characters become more involved in the action of the play and show their motivations, we naturally learn more about them. Our understanding of motivation lies at the heart of analysis.

D. ASSIGNMENT:

1. Reading Material: *Florence* (Alice Childress)
2. Define :
 - a. the motivations of each character in this play
 - b. the types of characters in this play
 - c. the devices of characterization in this play

CHAPTER VI
ACTION, CONFLICT, AND PLOT
MAKE UP A PLAY'S DEVELOPMENT

More than two thousand years ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle pointed out that the most important element of drama is the *fable*, what we call the *story*, or *plot*. Plot is the central aspect of all drama, for drama is primarily concerned with what happens. It means a series of incidents or episodes which follow after one another according to the dramatist's plan: every incident is connected- often in a very subtle way- to incidents which follow. The fable, said Aristotle, has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. As obvious as this observation seems, it emphasizes the dramatist's special need to engage an audience early and keep it engaged until the conclusion of the play.

Recognizing the drama's strict time limits, Aristotle set down a number of conditions for developing the fable, or plot, in a clear and interesting way. According to Aristotle, the heart of the dramatic story is the *agon*, or *argument*, and the conflict surrounding this argument creates tension and incites interest. The two sides of the conflict, the pros and contras of the argument, are represented on stage by the *protagonist* and the *antagonist*. The protagonist may be one person or many, and the antagonist may be a person, a group, a thing, or a force (supernatural or natural). We often call the protagonist of a play its hero or *heroine*, and sometimes the antagonist it also the *villain*.

The fundamental struggle between the protagonist and the antagonist is developed according to a set pattern that theater audiences have come to recognize and expect. In short, plays are made up of a series of sequential and related actions. The actions are connected by chronology. Conflict is the central struggle between two or more forces in a story, which may be internal or external. This conventional structure can be varied, of course, but most dramatic literature contains the following components:

- a. *Point of attack* – the starting point from which the dramatist leads the audience into the plot. A playwright can begin at the story's beginning and allow the

audience to discover what is going on at the same time the characters do; or the writer can begin in the middle of things (*in medias res*), or even near the end, and gradually reveal the events that have already taken place

- b. *Exposition* – the revelation of facts, circumstances, and past events. Establishing the essential facts about the characters and the conflict can be accomplished in a number of ways: from having minor characters reveal information through conversation to plunging the audience right into the action. Exposition can also be defined as the opening portion which provides the reader with the essential information on who, what, when, where
- c. *Rising action* – the building of interest through complication of the conflict. In this stage the protagonist and antagonist move steadily toward a confrontation. The part of a narrative preceding the climax. In this, the protagonist usually meets the complication of the plot to reach his goal
- d. *Climax* – the play’s high point, the decisive showdown between protagonist and antagonist. The climax – the play’s turning point – can be a single moment or a series of events, but once reached, it becomes a point of no return. It is also The greatest tension of the story. It often takes the form of a confrontation between the protagonist and antagonist.
- e. *Falling action* – It often gives the hints on what kind of ending that the story offers. It is also the unraveling of the plot, where events fall into place and the conflict moves toward final resolution.
- f. *Denouement* – the play’s conclusion; the explanation or outcome of the action. The term *denouement* (literally an “untying”) may be applied to both comedy and tragedy, but the Greeks used the word *catastrophe* for a tragic denouement, probably because it involved the death of the hero or heroine. It returns the characters to another stable situation. Whatever it is called, the denouement marks the end of the play: the lovers kiss, the bodies are carried off the stage, and the audience goes home. Most dramatists employ this traditional pattern. Even when they mix in other devices, rearrange elements, and invent new ways to exhibit their materials, dramatists still establish a conflict, develop both sides of the argument, and reach a credible conclusion. After centuries of the after history, the basic structure of drama has changed very little.

- g. *Catastrophe* (in Tragedy): The catastrophe is the main action of the play and is often a death, usually the death of the hero or the heroine. The catastrophe, though depressing and usually unpleasant, satisfies because it fulfills the audience's expectations. It is almost always the logical result of the raising action and the falling action: the catastrophe is the death which the audience has expected for a long time.

CHAPTER VII

FURTHER DIMENSIONS AND DEVICES

A. Tone or Atmosphere Creates Mood and Attitudes

Dramatists have unique ways conveying tone such as vocal ranges and stage gestures. Even silence, intensive stares, and shifting glances can be effective means for creating moods and controlling attitudes.

1. Sentimentalism

When a dramatist tries to produce or reflect an overabundance of emotion, he is usually creating a situation of sentimentalism. In addition to excessive emotionalism, sentimentalism also means excessive goodness. The weepy-eyed, honest, faithful, virtuous daughter is often a sentimental character because she is filled with uncontrolled emotions of tenderness, honesty, etc., while at the same time attracted to moral good. Thus, the hero is always moral and without bad habits, and he feels everything very deeply.

2. Cynicism

Cynicism is basically an attitude of superiority: an individual sets himself above his society and considers himself of greater value. The cynical playwright is one generally distrustful of any and all conventional ideas or theories of the goodness of human nature, and in his play he is apt to have cynical characters become successful. In other words, we should be on the lookout for cynicism both on the part of the author and in certain characters.

B. Symbolism and Allegory

In drama, as in fiction and poetry, the meaning of a symbol extends beyond its surface meaning. Dramatic symbols, which can be characters, settings, objects, actions, situations, or statements, can be either cultural or contextual.

C. Dramatic Irony

Often in a play we have a situation in which the character does not fully understand the significance of his actions or statements. The character's actions have a relevance to him which he does not perceive, and when this happens we describe the situation as one of dramatic irony. We observe a character unknowingly laying out plans which

will harm him. Dramatic irony results through the imbalance of knowledge between the character and the audience. Only we in the audience see the full picture; our understanding is often enhanced because we, but not as a particular character, were “present” in a previous scene. In fact, because we are “present” to all of the scenes in the play, while every character is sometimes absent, we know more than anyone of them. Dramatic Irony is used very widely by playwrights of all ages, primarily because it is a device by means of which the audience and the playwright can be brought into a shared secret; we acquire an immediate knowledge of the characters and revel in knowing things which they do not.

D. Mistaken Identity

One specialized kind of irony is that of mistaken identity. Some plays in fact have plots entirely dependent on the device of mistaken identity. In this situation, some of the characters on the stage are simply unaware of the identity of other characters while the audience knows who everybody is. Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* makes use of this device through the character of Viola. An even better example is provided by the well-known eighteenth century comedy, Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer*, or in Oscar Wilde’s *Importance of Being Ernest*. In those plays, the ways in which the characters mistake the identities of the others provide the central humor of the plays.

E. Pathos

It is the quality which moves the audience to pity, tenderness, or sorrow. Usually we observe pathos in situations where there is a helpless character, one who suffers because of certain sadness. When the character is caught up in sorrow and we pity her (more often “her” than “him”) we consider her pathetic.

F. Parody

Quite often a playwright will write a play which is an obvious parody of another play, usually of a serious nature. Usually the actions, kinds of characters, and language are all satirized in a parody- an excellent example being Henry Fielding’s famous parody of the heroic tragedy of Dryden in his *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, or *The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*. In this parody, Fielding humorously satirizes some

forty-two plays by mocking their serious employed dramatic conventions of character and speech.

G. Didacticism

When a playwright is consciously lecturing us on certain moral principles- and generally the superiority of moral good- he or she is usually didactic. Some playwrights have some lessons to teach us and through both the actions and the speeches of the characters the playwright presents his or her argument. If the didacticism of the playwright is associated very strongly with a certain well-known system or doctrine (political, philosophical, religious) the playwright and the play are often described as doctrinaire.

H. Assignment

1. Reading Material: *A Woman of No Importance* by Oscar Wilde
2. Reveal the plot development in this play
3. What kinds of devices are used in this play?

CHAPTER VIII

THEME

When analyze a play we not merely concerned with the functioning of its various necessary components such as action, characters, structure, and patterns of imagery. Our ultimate task is always the explanation of what the play means and what the significance attached to the action, characters, and imagery is. There is usually a central theme which can be discovered. It is the general idea or insight revealed in a play; the overall meaning the reader derives from the story. In other words, theme or meaning is the ideas that the play dramatizes. Commonly, playwrights are eager to explore some basic human relationships as follows.

1. Man and Nature

Most playwrights explore the relationship between man and the natural world in one way or another. For example, playwrights may consider nature a hostile or destructive force. In this situation, man is often seen unable to cope with an oppressive environment, which also reveals how small a thing is man, how finite, how mutable, especially when compared to the permanence of nature. In addition to this pessimistic feature, playwrights also depict mutually beneficial relationship between man and nature.

2. Man and Society

Many plays address themselves to the nature of the relationship between man and society. For example, man hates society because it restricts his freedom of personal action, which is a universal theme; or man criticizes the particular contemporary society in which the playwright and the audience presently live, which is a more timely theme.

3. Universal Themes of an Abstract Nature

The relationship between man and society and between man and nature can be discussed in fairly concrete terms: other themes are more abstract and our interpretations of them are also therefore more abstract. The themes such as death, freedom, morality, love, and all of the emotions which connect to these such as hate,

revenge, jealousy, possessiveness, etc. are difficult to discuss as they require our private interpretations more.

4. Family Relationship

There are countless plays that are aimed at the description of common human relationships, particularly those between particular members of particular families. There are some universal patterns of family relationships such as the harmfully possessive mother, the jealous brother, etc., and our interpretation of the play can be made more accurate simply by considering whether or not a particular family relationship is typical or highly different. There are also special family relationships such as incest, which is not easily discoverable in the relationships between members of ordinary families.

To conclude, in trying to interpret a play, we base our interpretation on the actions which emerge: what happens in the play is our largest clue to what the play means. And yet when we are interpreting that action we are likely to draw different conclusions from those drawn by someone else interpreting the action. Besides, our interpretation of a play is basically our own conception of the play. That is, although we can discuss the playwright's intentions and can establish the theme as one dealing with, for example, the relationship between man and his society, finally we must explain our own conception of the play. First, we consider the ways in which we feel affected by the play and then we try to explain why we are affected in these particular ways. Sometimes we have undeniably personal associations with the action or characters of a play: we are reminded of events or attitudes in our own lives. We have, in other words, some subjective involvement in the world of the play which almost automatically colors our conception of the play as a work of art.

Assignment:

1. Reading material: *A Raisin in the Sun* (Lorraine Hunsberry)
2. Find the themes in the play

CHAPTER IX

TRAGEDY

A. The Origins of Tragedy

Tragedy is a drama in which a major character not only undergoes a loss but also achieves illumination or a new perspective. It is considered the most elevated literary form because it concentrates affirmatively on the religious and cosmic implications of its major character's misfortunes. In ancient Greece, it originated as a key element in Athenian religious festival during the decades before Athens became a major military, economic, and cultural power during the fifth century B.C.E.

Tragedy was originally linked to the choral dithyrambs. In view of that it is important to stress that *tragedy, and therefore drama, began as a form for choruses, not for actors*. Even after actors became dominant in the plays, the chorus was important enough for Aristotle to state that "the chorus should be regarded as one of the actors" (*Poetics* 7, p.69)

The subject matter of tragedy was drawn from tales of prehistoric times. Greek myths illustrated divine-human relationship and served as examples or models of heroic behavior. These myths became the fixed tragic subject matter. The mythical heroes were kings, queens, princes, and princesses. They engaged in conflicts; they suffered; and, often, they died. Though great and noble they were nevertheless human, and a common critical judgment is that they were dominated by hubris (hybris): arrogance, pride, insolence, violence, which was manifested in destructive actions such as deceit, betrayal, revenge, cruelty, murder, suicide, etc. By truthfully demonstrating the faults of these heroes along with their greatness, the writers of tragedy also invoked philosophical and religious issues that provided meaning and values in the face of misfortune and suffering.

B. The Three Greatest Athenian Tragic Playwrights (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides)

To gain the honor of victory during the centuries of the competitions, many writers of tragedy composed and submitted many plays. The total number must have been exceedingly large, certainly in the high hundreds and likely in the thousands. Most of these have long since vanished because many of the writers were

insignificant and also because there were no more than a few copies of each plays, all handwritten on perishable papyrus scrolls.

A small number of works by three tragic playwrights, however, have survived. These dramatists are **Aeschylus**, who added a second actor; **Sophocles** who added third actor, created scene design, and enlarge the chorus from twelve to fifteen; and **Euripides**. Although these three playwrights did not win prizes every time they entered the competitions, a consensus grew that they were the best, and by the middle of the fourth century B.C.E., their works were recognized as classics. Although tragedies had originally been intended for only one performance-at the festival for which they competed-an exception was made for these three dramatists, whose tragedies were than performed repeatedly both in Athens and elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world.

The combined output of the three classic playwrights was slightly more than three hundred plays, of which three-fourths were tragedies and one-fourth were satyr plays. As many as eight hundred years after the end of the fifth century B.C.E., these plays, together with many other Greek tragedies, satyr plays, and comedies, were available to readers who could afford to buy copies or to pay scribes to copy them ⁶. However, with the increasing dominance of Christianity the plays fell into neglect because they were considered pagan and also because vellum or parchment, which made up the pages of the books (*codices*) that replaced papyrus scrolls, was enormously expensive and was reserved for Christian works. Most of the unique and priceless copies of Athenian plays were subsequently destroyed or thrown out with the garbage.

C. Aristotle and the Nature of Tragedy

In his book “Poetics” Aristotle mentions that the key to tragedy is the concept of catharsis, which becomes the goal of tragedy. By this, tragedy arouses the disturbing emotions of pity and fear. Many people argue that tragedy produces a therapeutic effect through an actual purging or vomiting of emotions- a sympathetic release of feelings that produces emotional relief and encourages psychological health. In other words, tragedy heals. According to him, there are three major elements of tragic plot which are significant.

a. The reversal of the situation (*peripeteia*): a change by which the action turns round to its opposite.

b. The recognition (anagnorisis): a change from ignorance to knowledge producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune.

According to him in the best and most powerful tragedies, the reversal and the recognition occur together and create surprise.

c. A scene of suffering (pathos): a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, *etc.*

Thus, the tragic plot is structured to arouse and shape emotions Aristotle concedes that tragedy is not true in the sense that history is true. He therefore stresses that a tragic plot is not an exact imitation or duplication of life, but rather a **representation** or *mimesis*. The concept of representation acknowledges both the moral role of the writers and the artistic freedom needed to create works conducive to proper responses. A tragic plot, therefore, consists of a self-contained and concentrated single action. Anything outside this action, such as unrelated incidents of the major character, is not to be contained in the play. The action of *Oedipus the King*, for example, is focused on Oedipus's determination as king of Thebes to free his city from the pestilence that is destroying it. Although other aspects of his life are introduced in the plays dialogue because they are relevant to the action, they are reported rather than dramatized. Only those incident integral to the action are included in the play.

To sum up, Aristotle's definition of tragedy is related to his idea that tragedy, as a dramatic form, is designed to evoke powerful emotions and thereby, through catharsis, to serve both a salutary and ethical purpose. The tragic incident and plot must be artistically constructed to produce the "essential tragic effect". Therefore Aristotle stresses that plot and incident, arranged for this effect, form the end or goal of tragedy

D. Performance and the Formal Organization of Greek Tragedy

On performance days, the competing playwrights staged their plays from morning to afternoon, first the tragedies, then the satyr plays (and after these, comedies by other writers). Because plays were performed with a minimum of scenery and props, dramatists used dialogue to establish times and locations. Each tragedy was performed in the order of the formally designated sections that modern

editors have marked in the printed texts. It is therefore possible to describe the production of a play in terms of these structural divisions.

1. The First Part Was the Prologue, the Play's Exposition

There was considerable variety in the performance of the **prologue**. Sometimes it was given by a single actor, speaking as either a mortal or a god. In *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles used all three actors for the prologue (Oedipus, the Priest, and Creon), speaking to themselves and also to the extras acting as the Theban populace.

2. The Second Part Was the Parados, the Entry of the Chorus into the Orchestra

Once the chorus members entered the orchestra, they remained there until the play's end. Because they were required to project their voices to spectators in the top seats, they both sang and chanted their lines. They also moved rhythmically in a number of stanzaic *strophes* (turns), *antistrophes* (counter turns), and *epodes* (units following the songs). These dance movements, regulated by the rhythm of the *aulos* or flute as in military drill, were done in straight-line formations of five or three, but we do not know whether the chorus stopped or continued moving when delivering their lines. After the *parados*, the choristers would necessarily have knelt or sat at attention, in this way focusing on the activities of the actors and, when necessary, responding as a group.

3. The Play's Principal Action Consisted of Four Episodes and Stasimons

With the chorus as a model audience, the drama itself was developed in four full sections or acting units. The major part of each section was the **episode**. Each episode featured the actors, who presented both action and speech, including swift one-line interchanges known as **stichomythy**.

When the episode ended, the actors withdrew. The following second part of the acting section was called a *stasimon* (plural *stasima*), performed by the chorus in the *orchestra*. Like the *parados*, the *stasima* required dance movements, along with the chanting and singing of strophes, antistrophes, and epodes. The topics concerned the play's developing action, although over time the *stasima* became more general and therefore less integral to the play.

4. The Play Concluded with the Exodos

When the last of the four episode-*stasimon* sections had been completed, the *exodos* (literally, “a way out”), or the final section, commenced. It contained the resolution of the drama, the exit of the actors, and the last pronouncements, dance movements, and exit of the chorus.

5. The Role of the Chorus Was Diminished as Greek Tragedy Evolved

We know little about tragic structure at the very beginning of the form, but Athenian tragedies of the fifth century B.C.E. followed the pattern just described. Aeschylus, the earliest of the Athenian writers of tragedy, lengthened the episodes, thus emphasizing the actors and minimizing the chorus. Sophocles made the chorus even less important. Euripides, Sophocles’s younger contemporary, concentrated on the episodes, making the chorus almost incidental. In later centuries, dramatists dropped the choral sections completely, establishing a precedent for the five-act structure adopted by Roman dramatists and later Renaissance dramatists.

E. Irony in Tragedy

Implicit in the excessiveness of tragic suffering is the idea that the universe is mysterious and often unfair and that unseen but power-full force-fate, fortune, circumstances, and the gods-directly intervene in human life. As a result, a good deed may produce suffering, and an evil deed may produce reward. These examples illustrate the commonness of situational and cosmic irony in tragedy. Characters are pushed into situations that are caused by others or that they themselves unwittingly cause. When they try to act responsibly and nobly to relieve their situations, their actions do not produce the expected result.

For example, Oedipus brings suffering on himself just when he succeeds-and *because* he succeeds-in rescuing his city. Whether on the personal or cosmic level, therefore, there is no escape: no way to evade responsibility, and no way to change the universal laws that push human beings into such situations. Situational and cosmic irony is not only found in ancient tragedies. In *Death of Salesman*, Miller’s hero, Willy Loman, is gripped not so much by godly power as by time-the agent of destruction being the unavoidable force of economic circumstances.

These ironies are related to what is called the **tragic dilemma** – a situation that forces the tragic protagonist to make a difficult choice. The tragic dilemma has also been called a “lose-lose” situation. Thus, Oedipus cannot avoid his duty as king of Thebes because that would be ruinous. In other words, the choices posed in a tragic dilemma seemingly permit freedom of will, but the consequences of any choice demonstrate the inescapable fact that powerful forces, perhaps even fate or inevitability, baffle even the most reasonable and noble intentions.

F. Dramatic Irony Focuses Attention on the Tragic Limitations of Human Vision and Knowledge

It is from a perspective of something like divinity that we as readers or spectators perceive the action of tragedies. We are like the gods because we always know more than the characters. Such dramatic irony permit us, for example, to know what Oedipus does not know: in defensive anger, he kills his real father, and he himself is therefore his city’s trouble. Similar dramatic irony can be found in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, for we realize that Claudius murdered Hamlet’s father. Hamlet himself has only doubtful suspicions of this truth. The underlying basis of dramatic irony in real life is of course that none of us can know our own futures exactly, and few if any can anticipate accident, illness, and all the social, economic, and political misfortune that may distress or destroy our way of life.

G. Classical Tragedy vs. Modern Tragedy

a) Classical Tragedy

- The play must have an unhappy ending.
- The incidents in it must arouse pity & fear
- The tragic heroes have a kind of ruinous flaw: pride or ambition which causes the tragic hero’s unfortunate fate. This flaw should lead him to his despair & death.
- The main character must not be an ordinary man since Aristotle says that a tragedy is a story of a man of note in his great reputation. He believes that a tragedy with this kind of main character will effectively arouse the audience’s feeling of sympathy.

- The main characters of Shakespearean Tragedies are mostly kings, princes, or leaders. It seems to be a great pleasure how fortunes strike down the tragic hero in his pride.

b) Modern Tragedy

- It still has some basic characteristics of classical tragedy: dealing with flaws, calamities, pain and sorrow.
- Unlike in classical tragedies, the tragic heroes do not always deal with their own death.
- Unlike in classical tragedies, the main characters may be common people who are not in high levels.
- The problems found are more representative to people's daily lives.

H. Assignment:

1. Reading material: Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman
2. Reveal the elements of tragedy in it

CHAPTER X

COMEDY

A. The Origins of Comedy

(1) The Earliest Greek Comedy Is Called Old Comedy

The comedies of the fifth century B.C.E., called **Old Comedy** or **Old Attic Comedy** by later historians, followed intricate structural patterns and displayed complex poetic conventions. Most comic improvisations were an outgrowth of “phallic songs” which were bacchanalian processions that took place during the **Lenaia**, the Athenian religious festival held in January - February each year in *Gamelion*, the month of weddings, just following the winter solstice.

The word *comedy* is consistent with this explanation, for as “a *komos* song” its Greek meaning is “a song of revels” or ‘a song sung by merrymakers’. We may conclude that these *komos* processions were encouraged officially in the belief and hope that human ceremonies would encourage divine favor and bring about prosperity and happiness. As the form developing out of such processions, comedy began with many of these characteristic and has retained them to the present day. Love, marriage, and ritualized celebrations of a happy future are usually the major concerns of comedy. Often the plots and actions are outrageous, the characters are funny, and the language is satirical, vulgar, and biting.

(2) Middle Comedy Became Prominent after Aristophanes

All the middle Comedy plays by other authors are lost, although there are many existing fragments. Middle Comedy eliminated some of the complex patterns of Old Comedy and treated more broadly international and less narrowly Athenian topics. Political criticism was abandoned, and character types such as the braggart soldier were introduced. The role of the chorus was diminished or eliminated (as with tragedy), and the exaggerated costumes were eliminated.

(3) New comedy, a Type of Romantic Comedy, Flourished after Middle Comedy

By the end of the fourth century B.C.E., Middle Comedy was replaced by **New Comedy**. The most important of the New Comedy dramatist was Menander (342-293

B.C.E.), who was regarded in ancient times as the greatest comic writer of them all, but after the fifth century C.E., copies of Menander's plays were no longer available and were presumed totally lost. His comedies, which are romantic rather than satirical, employ such stock characters as young lovers, stubborn fathers, clever slaves, and long separated relatives.

(4) Roman Comedy Was Composed Largely in the Third and Second Centuries B.C.E.

After Menander, Greek power in the Mediterranean decreased and was replaced by the might of Rome. In the third century B.C.E. Roman comedy began and flourished, largely through the translation and adaptation of Greek New Comedies. The significant Roman writers were Plutus, with twenty surviving comedies, and Terence, whose six comedies all exist. The central issue in most of the Roman comedies is the overcoming of a **blocking agent**, or obstruction to true love, that could be almost anyone or anything – a rival lover, an angry father, a family feud, an old law, a previously arranged marriage, or differences in social class. The pattern of action, traditionally called the **plot of intrigue**, stems from the subterfuges that young lovers undertake to overcome the blocking agent, so that the outcome frequently announces the victory of youth over age and the passing of control from one generation to the next.

(5) Comedy from Roman Times to the Renaissance

By the time the Roman Empire was established in 29 B.C.E., the writing of comedy had virtually disappeared because Roman dramatic creativity had been replaced by pantomime entertainments and public spectacles such as gladiatorial combat. Although many comic and farcical scenes were included in the mystery cycles of late medieval times, comedy as a form was not reestablished until the Renaissance.

Once reintroduced, comedy grew rapidly. By 1500 the six plays of Terence had been discovered and were achieving wide recognition, followed by the twenty surviving plays of Plautus. When English dramatists began writing comedies, they followed Roman conventions. The English plays of the mid sixteenth century contained five acts and observed the unities of time place and action, thus following the rules and justifying the claim that they were “regular”. Character types from the

Roman comedies, such as the intriguing couple, the fussing father, and the bragging soldier, initially predominated. Soon more specifically English types appeared, anticipating the roisterers in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and the "mechanicals" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. By the end of the sixteenth century, when Shakespeare had completed many of his comedies, English comedy was in full bloom. It has commonly been observed that the comedy was Latin in structure but English in character.

B. The Patterns, Characters, and Language of Comedy

Dictionaries sometimes give *funny* as a synonym for *comic*, but the two terms are not identical. Words like *funny*, *amusing*, *comical*, or *humorous* define our emotional conditioning to incidents, and our reactions always depend on context. We usually think it is funny or comical to see an actor in a slapstick routine falling down, being hit in the face with a cream pie, or being struck with a paddle. We laugh because we know that everything is staged and that no real harm is being done. But if we leave the theater and see some of the same things occurring on the streets, we are horrified to recognize that someone is enduring real harm and real pain. Street violence occurs randomly, with no apparent purpose, and there is nothing funny or comic about it, but onstage all actions occur as part of a governing pattern or plan leading to a satisfying outcome. It is the context that makes the difference.

C. Types of Comedy

Differences in comic style, content, and intent that have evolved over the centuries make it possible to divide comedy into various types. The broadest of these divisions, based on both style and content, separates comic literature into *high comedy* and *low comedy*.

1. High Comedy Develops Mainly from Character

Ideally, high comedy (a term coined by George Meredith in 1877 in *The Idea of Comedy*) is witty, graceful, and sophisticated. The problems and complications are more closely related to character than to situation, even though, admittedly, they develop out of situations. The appeal of high comedy is to the intellect, for the comic resolution must come about because the characters learn enough to accept adjustments

and changes in their lives. An only simple change of situation alone will not do for high comedy.

(a). Romantic comedy focuses on problems of youthful love.

One of the major kinds of high comedy is **romantic comedy**, which views action and character from the standpoint of earnest young lovers. This kind of play is built on a plot of intrigue featuring lovers who try to overcome opposition to achieve a successful union. The aim of such plays is amusement and entertainment rather than ridicule and reform.

(b). Comedy of manners tests the strength of social customs and assumptions.

Related to romantic comedy is the **comedy of manners**, an important type from the seventeenth century to our own times. The comedy of manners examines and satirizes attitudes and customs in the light of high intellectual and moral standards. The dialogue is witty and sophisticated, and characters are often measured according to their linguistic and intellectual powers. The love plots are serious and real, even though they share with romantic comedy the need to create intrigues to overcome opposition and impediments. People might consider them not only as plays of manners but also as plays of social and personal problems.

(c). Satiric comedy, like all satire, ridicules vices and follies.

Midway between high and low comedy is **satiric comedy**, which is based in a comic attack on foolishness and/or nastiness. The playwright of satiric comedy assumes the perspective of a rational and moderate observer measuring human life against a moderate norm that is represented by high and serious characters.

2. Low Comedy Dwells along with the Silly and Awkward

In **low comedy** emphasis is on funny remarks and outrageous circumstances; complications develop from situation and plot rather than from character. Plays of this type are by definition full of physical humor and stage business – a character rounds his forefinger and thumb to imitate a hole in a wall, through which other characters speak; a grumpy man constantly breaks furniture; a character masquerading as a doctor takes the pulse of a father to determine the daughter's medical condition;

characters who have just declaimed their love are visited by people to whom they formerly swore love.

The classic type of low comedy is **farce** the aim of which, in the words of Henry Fielding, “is but to make you laugh”. A farce is a weird physical comedy overflowing with silly characters, improbable happenings, wild clowning, pratfalls, extravagant language, and vulgar jokes.

3. Other Kinds of Comedy Emphasize Complexity and Absurdity

Other types of modern and contemporary comedy include **ironic comedy**, **realistic comedy**, and **comedy of the absurd**. All of these shun the happy endings of traditional comedy. Often, the blocking agents are successful, the protagonists are defeated, and the initial problem – either a realistic or an absurdist dilemma – remains unresolved. Such comedies, which began to appear in the late nineteenth century, illustrate the complexities and absurdness of modern life and the funny but futile efforts that people make when coming to grips with existence.

D. Comic Problems Flourish along with Chaos and Potential Disaster

Before the moments of change leading to the comic conclusion, however, comedy must introduce many of the problems and complications that could, in real life, lead not to happiness but to unhappiness and even to calamity. These problems can be personal social, political, economic or military; in short, they may enter every arena of human affairs. A man wants to find love, but he also needs to find a place in the world and to gain his fortune. A woman needs to protect herself against someone who might take advantage of her, and thus she behaves defensively and strangely. A group of people need to succeed in business – or perhaps to fail in business. A politician is accused of corruption and thus needs help in exonerating himself. A man and woman in love become angry or disenchanted because they are fed lies and distortions about each other. Another man and woman need to overcome family hostility so that they may successfully begin their lives together with the approval of everyone around them. Still another man and woman, upon meeting for the first time, become so angry they threaten to murder each other. Failure, though it is to be always overcome in comedy, is never far away; it lurks over the horizon, around corners, in business rooms, and in malicious telephone calls, waiting to emerge uncertainty, indecisiveness, and distress.

All such situations, which might possibly lead to ruin, are the stuff of comedy. The worse, things seem, and the more apparently chaotic, the better. In a good comic complication, the problems are constantly being fueled by misunderstanding, mistaken identity, misdirection, misinformed speech, errors in judgment, faults in intelligence, excessive or unreasonable behavior, and coincidences that stretch credulity.

E. The Comic Climax Is the Peak of Confusion

Such complications lead ultimately to the comic climax, which is that moment or moments in the play when everything reaches the peak of confusion and when no good solution seems in sight. Misunderstanding is dominant, pressure is at a high point, and choices must be made even though solutions seem impossible. The catastrophe – the changing or turning point – is frequently launched by a sudden revelation in which a new fact, a misunderstood event, or a previously hidden identity is explained to characters and audience at the same time, and then things undergo a turnaround and start rushing toward improvement.

F. The Comic Denouement Restores Sanity and Calm

In most comedies, the events of the denouement resolve the initial problems and allow for the comic resolution, which dramatizes how things are set right at every level of action. Errors are explained, personal lives are straightened out, people at odds with each other are reconciled, promises are made for the future, new families are formed through marriage, and a stable social order is reestablished.

G. Comic Characters Are More Limited than Characters in Tragedy

Comic characters are relatively limited because they are almost necessarily common and representative rather than individual and heroic. Characters with individuality are therefore not typical of comedy. Instead, comedy gives us stock characters who represent classes, types, and generations. In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in many of the characters are representative and stock figures. Egeus is a conventionally indignant and unreasonable father, and Hermia and Lysander are typical young lovers (along with Helena and Demetrius). In Kauffmann's *The More the Merrier* (Chapter 21) the two lovers, Emily and Raphael, are drawn from a world of high society, mutual acquaintances, and exclusive club life.

Although Kauffmann's characters do succeed in confronting serious personal problems, it is difficult to imagine that they could ever reach the understanding and insight of majestic characters like Hamlet and Oedipus.

H. Comic Language Is a Vital Vehicle of Humor

As in other types of literature, comic dramatists use language to delineate character, to establish tone and mood, and to express ideas and feelings. In comedy, however, language is also one of the most important vehicles for humor. Some comedies are characterized by elegant and witty language, others by puns and bawdy jokes.

Characters in comedy tend either to be masters of language or to be mastered by it. Those who are skillful with language can use knife-like witty phrases to satirize their foes and friends alike. Those who are unskilled with language, like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, bungle their speeches because they misuse words and stumble into inadvertent puns. Both types of characters are amusing; we smile a knowing smile with the wits and laugh aloud at the wits and the foolish.

I. Tragedy vs. Comedy

- Tragedy involves events which climax in unhappy disaster.
Comedy deals with events which find some sort of pleasing or happy resolution
- Tragedy is necessary dark in subject matter
Comedy is essentially light.
- In tragedy the hero is defeated by forces outside his control.
In comedy the hero overcomes impediments in an entertaining, humorous way-
and is usually successful.
- In tragedy man is mastered by fate and nature.
In comedy man wins over opposing forces.
- There is a basic dichotomy in both emotion and event between comedy in its cheerful optimism and tragedy in its somber pessimism

- But there is also inherent overlapping between the two: most tragedies have a certain amount of humor while most comedies have a certain bitter or serious aspect which is hard to avoid.

E.g. - Shakespeare never allows a matter- treated dramatically- to be all funny or all sad.

- Chekov always claimed that his play “Uncle Vanya” was a comedy, while most of his audience has interpreted it as a tragedy.

- Many plays are simply referred to as tragic-comedy because there is such an obvious blend of humor and sadness, lightness and seriousness.
- The most distinguishing fact of tragedy- conspicuously absent in comedy- is the concept of a hero with some sort of ruinous flaw—Othello’s pride, Macbeth’s ambition, etc.

In comedy there is no reason to present some kind of flaw for the hero will usually be victorious over the forces which oppose him.

In other words, **comedy** as we know arose in ancient Greece, just as tragedy did. Comedy is therefore the fraternal twin of tragedy. Many comedies are filled with tragic potential, and many tragedies contain potentially comic plots. Indeed, tragedy can be seen as an abortive or incomplete comedy in which affairs go wrong, and comedy can be considered a tragedy in which the truth is discovered (or covered up), the hero saves the day, the villain is overcome, and equilibrium and balance are restored. The major differences are that tragedy moves toward despair or death, while comedy moves toward success, happiness, and marriage. Tragic diction is elevated and heroic. Comic diction can be elevated too, but often it is common or colloquial, and although it is frequently witty, it is also sometimes witless and bawdy. The primary difference is that the mask of tragedy grieves and weeps, but the mask of comedy smiles and laughs.

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