CHAPTER- 1

Comedy: concept and elements, a historical perspective.

Drama as a literary art :

In general, a work written to be performed by actors on a stage. Drama is a Greek word meaning ‘action’, drawn from the Greek verb dran, ‘to do’. Drama originated in ancient Greece, developing from religious ceremonies.

Drama begins in make- believe, in the play acting of children, in the ritual of primitive religion. When an actor appears on stage, he makes believe he is someone other than himself, much as a child does, much as primitive people still do. Thus, like play-acting and ritual, drama creates its experience by doing things that can be heard and seen.

Drama has a holistic way of teaching people. Whether it be in a play or by partaking in a role-play situation, we learn through interactions with others this allows participants not to learn facts only, as they would from a book or in a classroom, but to enter the world of another person, to be allowed to explore how they feel about this situation or person, whether it be a war- torn town or the wolf in the ‘Three Little Pigs’. Every interaction with another character or situation gives a greater understanding of what is happening around us.

Most widely, it means any kind of mimetic performance, from a production of ‘Hamlet’ to the clowning of vaudeville comedians, to wordless pantomime or to a primitive ritual ceremony. Other found drama a convenient label for the sentimental plays dealing with contemporary problems. In the broadest sense, drama is simply ‘play’-where by a group of persons (primitive

savages, amateurs belonging to medieval guilds, modern professionals) impersonate certain characters before a group of their fellows. This impersonation way be intended mainly entertainment, but whatever its purpose, it is the first and cardinal element in drama. The second element is the presence of an audience.

Drama like prose fiction, utilizes plot and characters, develops a theme, arouses emotions or appeals in its dealings with life. Like poetry, it may draw upon all the resources of language, including verse. But drama has a characteristic peculiar to itself. It is written primarily to be performed. The common alternative name for a dramatic composition is play.

In one line drama is the art of composing writing, acting or producing plays. It is literary composition intended to portray life or character or to tell a story usually involving, conflicts and emotions exhibited through action and dialogue, designed for theatrical performance, or we say drama is a literary composition involving conflict, action crisis and atmosphere designed to be acted by players on a stage before an audience. This definition may be applied to motion picture drama as well as to the traditional stage.

Drama is neither primitive ritual nor child's play, but it does share with them the essential quality of enactment. This quality should remind us that drama is not solely a form of literature. Once it was literary art and represent national art. As literary art, a play is a fiction made out of words. It has a plot, characters and dialogue. But it is a special kind of fiction- a fiction acted out rather than narrated. In a novel or short story, we learn about characters and events through the words of a narrator who stands between us and them, but in a

play nothing stands between us and the total make-up of its word. Characters appear and events happen without any intermediate comment or explanation. Drama, then, offers us a direct presentation of its imaginative reality. In this sense it is a representational art.

There is no question that reading a play is a different experience from seeing it enacted. For one thing, readers do not have the benefit of the interpretations made by a director, actors and scene designers in presenting a performance.

Reading of a play is largely an idealized version of the play. The interpretation remains in our mind and is not translated to the stage. The dramatic effect of the staging is lost to us unless we make a genuine effort to visualize the staging and to understand its contribution to the dramatic experience. For a fuller experience of the drama when reading plays, one should keep in mind the historical period and the conventions of staging that are appropriate to the period and that are specified by the playwright.

Even when reading a play, we are encouraged to imagine actors speaking lines and visualize a setting in which those lines are spoken. When we are in the theatre, we see the actors, hear the lines are aware of the setting and sense the theatrical community of which we are a part. Drama is an experience in which we participate on many levels simultaneously. On one level, we may believe that, we know it is only make-believe. On one level we may be amused, but on other level we realize that serious statements about our society are being made. Drama is like most other literature in that is both entertains and instructs.

Some plays are meant to be read as well as staged, as evident in plays whose stage directions supply information that would be unavailable to an audience, such as the colors of the character's eyes, character's secret motives and other such details. It is not a certainly that seeing a play will produce an experience more 'true' to the play's meaning than reading it. Every act of reading silently or speaking the lines aloud is an act of interpretation. No one can say which the best interpretation is. Each has its own merits and the ideal is probably to do both for any play. Each of the great ages of drama has affected the way plays are written, acted and staged in successive ages. Today for example, drama borrows important elements from each earlier period.

But describing a play as an illusion of reality in no way means that it represents the precise reality that we take for granted in our everyday experience. Rather, drama ranges widely and explores multiple realities, some of which may seem very close to our own and some of which may seem improbably removed from our everyday experience.

When Aristotle wrote about drama in the poetics a work providing one of the earliest and most influential theories of drama, he began by explaining it as the imitation of an action. Those analyzing his work have interpreted this statement in several ways. One interpretation is that drama imitates life. From the beginning, drama has had the capacity to hold up on illusion of reality like the reflection in a mirror-we take the reality for granted while recognizing that it is nonetheless illusory. As we have seen, Aristotle described Dramatic Illusion as an imitation of an action. But unlike the reflection in a mirror, the action of most drama is not drawn from our actual experience of life, but from our

potential or imagined experience. In the great Greek drama, the illusion includes the narratives of ancient myths that were thought to hold profound illumination for the populace. The interpretation of the myths by the Greek playwrights over a three hundred-year period helped the Greek people participate in the myths, understand them, and integrate them into their daily lives.

The Greeks of the fifth century B.C. are credited with the dominating dramatic age, which lasted from the birth of Aeschylus (525 B.C) to the death of Aristophanes (385 B.C.)

Different ages have had different approaches towards representing reality on stage. The Greeks felt that their plays were exceptionally realistic and yet their actors spoke in verse and wore masks. The staging consisted of very little setting and no special costumes. Medieval drama was often acted on push wagons and carts. Elizabethan audiences were accustomed to actors occasionally conversing with the crowd at their feet near the apron of the stage. All Elizabethan plays were done in essentially contemporary clothing, with no more scenery than the suggesting of it in the spoken descriptions of the players. The actors recited their lines in verse, except when the author wanted to imply that the speaker was of low social station. Yet Elizabethans reported that their theatre was very much like life itself.

In modern drama the dramatic illusion of reality has grown to include not just the shape of an action, the events and characters but also the details of everyday life. Some modern plays make precise representation of reality a primary purpose, shaping the tone of the language to reflect the way modern

people speak, re-creating contemporary reality in the setting, language and other elements of the drama.

Verse drama :

Verse drama in dramatic form is verse form. It may be called poetic drama. In poetic drama the dialogue is written in verse which in English usually means blank verse, (blank verse consists of lines of iambic pentameter which are unrhymed) and in French in the twelve syllables line called an Alexandrine. Verse drama is particularly associated with the seriousness of tragedy, providing an artistic reason to write in this form, as well as the practical one that verse lines are easier for the actors to memorise exactly.

Closet drama :

Closet drama is written in dramatic form with dialogue indicated settings and stage directions, but is intended by the author to be read rather than to be performed. Most plays, after all, are written to be performed. Those eccentric few that are not-that are written only to be read we usually refer to as closet dramas, very little can take place in a closet, but anything is possible in the theatre. For most of us, however, the experience of drama is usually confined to plays in print rather than in performance. This means that we have to be unusually resourceful in our study of drama. Careful reading is not enough. We have to be creative readers as well. We have to imagine drama on the stage, not only must we attend to the meanings and implications of words-we also have to envision the words in performance.

Basically drama is divided into two major parts, one is Tragedy and the other one is Comedy. In this chapter I have tried to express elaborately the two major parts of drama and its importance and value. Because without understanding Tragedy properly, it will be difficult to understand Comedy and identify its features.

The tragedy is presented in the form of action, not narrative. It will arouse pity and fear in the audience as it witnesses the action. It allows for an arousal of this pity and fear and creates an affect of purgation or catharsis of these strong emotions by the audience. Tragedy is serious by nature in its theme and deals with profound problems. These profound problems are universal when applied to the human experience. In classical tragedy we find a protagonist at the center of the drama that is a great person, usually of upper class birth. He is a good man that can be admired, but he has a tragic flaw, a hamartia, that will be the ultimate cause of his down fall. This tragic flaw can take on many characteristics but it is most often too much pride or hubris. The protagonist always learns, usually too late, the nature of his flaw and his mistakes that have caused his downfall. He becomes self-aware and accepts the inevitability of his fate and takes full responsibility for his actions. We must have this element of inevitability in tragedy. There must be a cause and effect relationship from the beginning through the middle to the end or final catastrophe. It must be logical in the conclusion of the necessary outcome. Tragedy will involve the audience in the action and create tension and expectation. With the climax and final end the audience will have learned a lesson and will leave the theatre not depressed or sullen, but uplifted and enlightened.

The term broadly applied to literary, and especially to dramatic representation of serious actions which eventuate in disastrous conclusion for the protagonist (the chief character).

The Greeks were the first and perhaps the greatest practitioners of tragedy. They were the first to theorize about what tragedy was and what made it ‘work’. Tragedy was first defined by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) who inferred its essential elements from witnessing the plays of his own time. He traced tragedy to the satyr plays in which the characters were half- man half- goat. The term was applied to all plays of high seriousness, with or without an unhappy ending. Much of what has been written and said about tragic drama returns in one way or another to Aristotle’s famous definition in the poetics.

‘A tragedy then, is an artistic imitation of an action that is serious, complete in it, and of adequate magnitude.” His observations, which he set down in the poetics, cannot be expected to explain all the tragedies that have ever been written; no single theory could possible do so. But Aristotle’s theory has influenced more dramatists- and critics- than any other propounded since his time, and thus it remains the best guide we have to the nature of tragedy.

Tragedy is usually divided into two basic kinds; Traditional and Modern. A lot of great tragedies were traditional tragedies. The modern kind did not come around till about the late 19th century.

In Traditional tragedies, the hero or heroine of the play is an "extraordinary character"; a king, queen, or someone of high social standing. The person of

high standing usually gets caught in a series of tragic circumstances, and it usually seems as if the universe is trapping the character into an inescapable fate. The character usually feels helpless but after the situation becomes too difficult, and the character realizes that there is no honorable avenue of escape, they decide to meet their fate. The hero then accepts responsibility for his or her actions and at most times shows a willingness to suffer for whatever they deserve. Another thing that sets traditional tragedy and modern apart is the actual language of the play. In traditional tragedy the language is verse. This is because often times the character is found trying to express profound ideas; dealing with and expressing extreme emotions in a human's life; most find that this is best expressed in poetry. In Traditional tragedies there are many morals, and hold so much meaning, that most people can spend their lives analyzing them just to obtain the full measure their meaning.

In Modern tragedies, kings and queens are not the central figures, and the language in which the play is written is "prose" rather than "verse". Modern tragedy is a form of tragedy which relates to our modern age. Many playwrights of modern drama argue that we do not have so many kings and queens in real life today, as we did before. This being said, they claim we can, and do, still have characters today who stand as symbolic figures for important segments of society. While traditional tragedy uses eccentric language and poetry to convey it's message, Modern focuses more on non-verbal expression. The structure of the plot, the movements and gestures used elements; such as sound and light, all communicate meanings "below the surface" that words cannot. Modern tragedy's purpose was to express things through what Konstantin Stanislavsky

called the "subtext" of a play. He found that the emotions, tension, and thoughts of a character appeared much stronger when they weren't displayed directly into the text.

Though these two approaches seem completely different, they both convey the same message and ask the same questions: "Why do people suffer, why violence does and injustice exists, what is the meaning of our lives."

Comedy :

A dramatic literary genre generally defined as the opposite of tragedy and characterized by the portrayal of amusing situations featuring ordinary people in ordinary situations. Comedy often begins with a sad or difficult situation but ends happily. Comedy also has been described as having a corrective or punitive character often ridiculing or satirizing problematic human behaviors. The endings of comedies frequently feature marriages or reunion of characters formerly separated by adverse circumstances. A comedy will normally be closer to the representation of everyday life than a tragedy and explore common human feelings rather than tragedy's disastrous crimes. Its ending will usually be happy for the leading character. The more topical 'comedy of ideas' in the plays of George Bernard Shaw. Among its less sophisticated forms are Burlesque and Farce.

In the most common literary application a comedy is fictional work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our pleasurable attention rather than our profound concern, we are made to feel confident that

no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief character. The term “Comedy” is customarily applied only to plays for the stage or motion pictures; it should be noted, however, that the comic form, so defined, also occurs in prose fiction and narrative poetry.

Comedy a form of drama that is intended to amuse and that ends happily. Comedy differs from Farce and Burlesque by having a more sustained plot, more weighty and subtle dialogue, more natural characters and less boisterous behavior. However, the borderline between comedy and other dramatic forms cannot be sharply defined, as there is much overlapping of technique, and different forms are frequently combined.

Since comedy strives to amuse, both wit and humor are utilized. The range of appeal is wide, varying from the crude effects of low comedy, to the subtle and idealistic reactions aroused by some high comedy.

English comedy developed from native dramatic forms growing out of the religious drama, the morality plays and interludes, and the performances of wandering entertainers, such as dancers and jugglers. In the Renaissance, the re discovery of Latin comedy and the effort to apply the rules of classical criticism to drama significantly affected the course of English comedy. Foreign influence on Restoration comedy or the Italian influence on Jacobean pastoral drama. In medieval times, the word comedy was applied to non-dramatic literary compositions marked by a happy ending and by less exalted style than was found in tragedy.

By Plato comedy is defined as the generic name for all exhibitions which have a tendency to excite laughter. Though its development was mainly due to the political and social conditions of Athens, it finally held up the mirror to all that was characteristic of Athenian life. By a consensus of authorities comedy has been arranged in three divisions, or rather should they be termed variations in form-the old, the middle and the new-and these will be convenient to follow.

Old Comedy :

The Old Comedy was a form of drama which has no parallel in subsequent European literature. It was a mixture of fantasy, political and personal satire, knockabout farce, obscenity (probably of ritual origin) and in the case of Aristophanes at least, delightful lyric poetry. It paid little attention to consistency of time or place or character and was not very interested in the logical development of a dramatic plot. This art Aristophanes practiced with superb skill. He brought to it a command of every kind of comedy, from slapstick to intellectual farce. In dialogue passages he wrote colloquial Attic Greek with splendid clarity and vigor, but he could also write beautiful lyric poetry as well, and he was a parodist of the highest class. He had a devastating way of deflating pomposity in politics, social life, and literature, but above all he had an inexhaustible fund of comic invention and sheer high spirits.

One of the greatest writers of the Old Comedy, which flourished in Athens in the 5th century B.C., and the only one with any complete plays surviving was Aristophanes (c. 450-after 385 B.C.). He wrote at least 36 comedies, of which 11 are extant.

The old comedy, dating from the establishment of democracy by Pericles, about 450 B.C., arose from the coarse jests of Dionysian revelers, to which was given a political application. In outward form these comedies were the most extravagant of burlesque, in essence they were the most virulent of abuse and personal verification. In its license of word and gesture, on its audacious directness of invective, no restriction was placed by the dramatist, the audience or the authorities, this license running to an excess that to modern play-goers would seem incredible. The satire and abuse were directed against some object of popular dislike, to whom were not only applied such epithets as coward, fool and knave, but he was represented as saying and doing everything that was contemptible, as suffering everything that was ludicrous and degrading. But this alone would not have won for comedy such recognition as it received from the refined and cultured community of the age of Pericles. The comic dramatist who would gain a hearing in Athens must borrow from tragedy all its most attractive features, its choral dances, its masked actors, its meters, its scenery and stage mechanism, and above all the chastened elegance of the Attic language--for this the audience required from the dramatist, as from the lyric poet and the orator. Thus comedy became a recognized branch of the drama, often presenting a brilliant sparkle in dialogue and a poetic beauty in the choral parts not unworthy of the best efforts of the tragic muse. Thus, also, it became a powerful engine in the hands of a skillful and unscrupulous politician.

It was upon this stock that the mighty genius of Aristophanes grafted the Pantagruelism, which, ever since it was reproduced by Rabelais, has had among European writers, as in Cervantes, Swift, Voltaire and others, some adequate representation. Though the word Pantagruelism is applied by Rabelais to the characters sustained by court fools, he made a free use both of the spirit and

mechanical appliances of old Greek comedy, adopting the disguise of buffoonery to attack some prevailing form of cant and hypocrisy. And this is precisely what Aristophanes did, the term invented by the great French master accurately describing the chief characteristics of his prototype.

Dramatic comedy grew out of the boisterous choruses and dialogue of the fertility rites of the feasts of the Greek god Dionysus. What became known to theatre historians as Old Comedy in ancient Greece was a series of loosely connected scenes (using a chorus and individual characters) in which a particular situation was thoroughly exploited through farce, fantasy, satire, and parody, the series ending in a lyrical celebration of unity.

New Comedy :

Reaching its height in the brilliantly scathing plays of Aristophanes, Old Comedy gradually declined and was replaced by less vital and imaginative drama. New Comedy, generally considered to have begun in the mid-4th cent. B.C., the plays were more consciously literary, often romantic in tone, and decidedly less satirical and critical. Menander was the most famous writer of New Comedy.

During the middle Ages the Church strove to keep the joyous and critical aspects of the drama to a minimum, but comic drama survived in medieval folk plays and festivals, in the Italian commedia dell'arte, in mock liturgical dramas, and in the farcical elements of miracle and morality plays.

Elizabethan Comedy :

In the sixteenth century, Christopher Marlowe contributed brilliant plays such as Tamburlaine (1587), Dr. Faustus (1588) and The Jew of Malta (1589). Marlowe was one of the best known names of a group of dramatists known as the University Wits. These playwrights had contact with the classical tragedies. Marlowe dealt with the conflict within the mind of man himself. He, as Shakespeare, wrote plays on human ambition. The character could pour out his thoughts in a soliloquy. His themes of history, legend and other aspects of man's life were much involved. He seemed also to be influenced by the Senecan model in revenge and in using blank verse as well. His style in each play represents its own organization. Marlowe used frequently alliteration, assonances and balance of adjectives in both halves of the lines in his poetical arrangement. Several new tones were added into blank verse. Eliot described him in his Essays on Poetry and Criticism that "Marlowe was a deliberate and conscious workman.

In this period, drama witnesses a new age which rather concentrates on the greatness of man. The most obvious fact about an Elizabethan audience was much clearly prepared than a modern audience to use imaginations.

The third famous poet dramatist was William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The Elizabethan literature was well-represented by his dramatic contributions. His genius actually springs from applying poetic language to drama. Being a creative man in poetry and drama, he realized early that the play must come first

and the words however brilliant must be subservient to it. Shakespeare wrote various types of plays: tragedies comedies as well as histories. *Julius Caesar, Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* is some of his famous plays.

With the Renaissance, a new and vital drama emerged. In the 16th century the tradition of the interlude, developed by John Heywood and others, blended with that of Latin classic comedy produced the great. This form reached its highest expression in the plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Shakespeare, whose comedies ranged from the farcical to the tragicomic, was the master of the romantic comedy. On the other hand Jonson was strongly influenced by classical tenets and wrote caustic, rich satire. The performers of Elizabethan comedy were not only expected to dance but also to be able to sing.

The comedies of Shakespeare are far from superficial. Those written in the middle of his career, such as *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, not only display with great skill many sides of human nature, but with indescribable lightness and grace introduce us to charming creations, speaking lines rich in poetry and sparkling with wit, and bring before our imaginations whole series of delightful scenes.

"The Tempest" does more than this. While it gives us again much of the charm of the earlier comedies, it is laden with the mellow wisdom of its author's riper years.

"The Alchemist," representing the work of Ben Jonson, belongs to a type which Shakespeare hardly touched-the Realistic Comedy. It is a vivid satire on

the forms of trickery prevailing in London about 1600-alchemy, astrology, and the like.

Comedy of Humours :

A special type of realistic comedy developed in the closing years of the sixteenth century by Ben Jonson and George Chapman. Comic interest is derived largely from the exhibition of “humorous” Characters; that is, persons whose conduct is controlled by some one characteristic “humour”. Some single exaggerated trait of character gave each important figure in the action a definite bias of disposition and supplied the chief motive for his action. Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour* (acted 1598) is an example.

The comedy of humours owes something to earlier vernacular comedy but more to a desire to imitate the classical comedy of Plautus and Terence. Satiric purpose and realistic method are emphasized in the comedies, which later into more serious character studies, as in Jonson’s *The Alchemist.* The comedy of humours was closely related to the contemporary comedy of manners and exerted an important influence on the comedy of the Restoration period.

Comedy of Manners :

In 17th-century France, the classical influence was combined with that of the commedia dell'arte in the drama of Molière, one of the greatest comic and satiric writers in the history of the theater. After a period of suppression during the Puritan Revolution, the English comic drama remerged with the witty, frequently licentious, consciously artificial comedy of manners of Etherege,

Wycherley, Congreve, and others. It is a very fine type of comedy where politeness, manners and proper language is essential. The humour is often represented to the audience as arrogant and silly snobs. It is extremely subtle and depends completely on the lines delivered and the dialogue and not so much on the actions. The wit of the dialogue and how it is manipulated is makes it funny, not the characters or situation. This type of comedy is for upper class folk and the irony is they tend to be laughing at themselves.

Towards the end of the 17th century, however, such stern reaction had set in against the bawdiness and frivolity of the Restoration stage that English comedy descended into a new form known as sentimental comedy. This drama, which sought more to evoke tears than laughter, had its counterpart in France in the comédie larmoyante.

In the stricter sense of the term, the type is concerned with the manners and conventions of an artificial, highly sophisticated society. The characters are more likely to be types than individualized personalities. Plot, though often involving a clever handling of situation and intrigue, is less important than atmosphere and satire. The prose dialogue is witty and polished. One distinguishing characteristic of the comedy of manners is a coarseness and immorality, partly because of the satirical purpose of this form of drama.

Comedy of Morals :

Satirical comedy designed to ridicule and correct vices like hypocrisy, pride, avarice, social pretensions, simony and nepotism. Moliere is the supreme playwright in the genre. Ben Jonson and Shaw are other notable instances.

Romantic Comedy :

It is a commonly found form in modern comedy. These comedies are made as real and down to earth as possible and the plays often involve adventure. Unlike comedy of manners, the humour is derived from the characters and their situations. These comedies traditionally have happy endings. Perhaps the most popular of all comic forms both on stage and on screen is the romantic comedy. In this genre the primary distinguishing feature is a love plot in which two sympathetic and well-matched lovers are united or reconciled. In a typical romantic comedy the two lovers tend to be young, likeable, and apparently meant for each other, yet they are kept apart by some complicating circumstance (e.g., class differences, parental interference; a previous girlfriend or boyfriend) until, surmounting all obstacles, they are finally wed. A wedding-bell, fairy-tale-style happy ending is practically mandatory. Examples: *Much Ado about Nothing*, Walt Disney's *Cinderella*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Sleepless in Seattle*

Satirical Comedy :

Satire is comedy without punch lines. Often human error is poked fun at albeit in a very serious manner. Often mistakes made by those in power and celebrities are made fun. Very sophisticated and requires much knowledge on the situation at hand. The subject of satire is human vice and folly. Its characters include con-artists, criminals, tricksters, deceivers, wheeler-dealers, two-timers, hypocrites, and fortune-seekers and the gullible dupes, knaves, goofs, and cuckolds who serve as their all-too-willing victims. Satirical comedies resemble other types of comedy in that they trace the rising fortune of a central character.

However, in this case, the central character (like virtually everybody else in the play or story) is likely to be cynical, foolish, or morally corrupt. Examples: Aristophanes' *The Birds*, Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. In its most extreme forms (e.g., the movies *Fargo* and *Pulp Fiction*), satirical comedy spills over into so-called Black comedy--where we're invited to laugh at events that are mortifying or grotesque.

Farce :

Humour is derived from the situation. The more extreme or impossible the situation is, the more hilarious it is. For example, someone wakes up and finds a goat in their bathtub. Characters can range from normal actors to caricatures. Actors always stay in character because it is easy for the audience to tell when humour is strained. The identifying features of farce are zaniness, slapstick humor, and hilarious improbability. The characters of farce are typically fantastic or absurd and usually far more ridiculous than those in other forms of comedy. At the same time, farcical plots are often full of wild coincidences and seemingly endless twists and complications. Elaborate comic intrigues involving deception, disguise, and mistaken identity are the rule. Examples of the genre include Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, the *Pink Panther* movies, and the films of the Marx Brothers and Three Stooges.

In England during the late 18th century a resurgence of the satirical and witty character comedies was found in the plays of Sheridan. After an almost complete lapse in the early to mid-19th cent., good comedy was again brought to the stage in the comedies of manners by Oscar Wilde and in the comedies of ideas by George Bernard Shaw. In the late 1880s the Russian dramatist Anton

Chekhov began writing his subtle and delicate comedies of the dying Russian aristocracy.

At country festivals held in celebration of the vintage it was the custom for people to pass from village to village, some in carts, uttering the vile jests and abuse unjustly attributed to the tragic choruses; others on foot, bearing aloft the Phallic emblem and singing the praises of Phales, the comrade of Bacchus. In cities it was also the custom, after an evening banquet, for young men to roam around the streets with torches in their hands, headed by a lyre or flute-player. Such a band of revelers was called a comu, and a member of the band a comoedus or comus-singer, the song itself being termed a comoedia, or comedy, just as a song of satyrs was named a tragoedia, or tragedy.

The Phallic processions were continued till the days of Aristotle, and idea was provided about the orations of Demosthenes that the riotous youths who infested the streets of Athens delighted in their comic buffooneries. Pasquinades of the coarsest kind were part of the exhibitions, and hence, probably, it was that comedy found a home at Athens during the time of Pericles, for it furnished the demagogues with a safe and convenient means of attacking their political opponents. When formally established as a branch of the drama it had its chorus, though less numerous and costly than the dithyrambic choir, and the actors, at first without masks, disguised their features by smearing them with the lees of wine.

In his Poetics the Greek philosopher Aristotle put forth the idea that *("A whole is what has a beginning and middle and end"*(1450b27).This three-part view of a plot structure (with a beginning, middle, and end – technically, the

protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe) prevailed until the Roman drama critic Horace advocated a 5-act structure in his Ars Poetica: "Neue minor neu sit quinto productior actu fabula" (lines 189-190) ("*A play should not be shorter or longer than five acts"*).

The third act is the climax, or turning point, which marks a change, for the better or the worse, in the protagonist's affairs. If the story is a comedy, things will have gone badly for the protagonist up to this point; now, the tide, so to speak, will turn, and things will begin to go well for him or her. If the story is a tragedy, the opposite state of affairs will ensue, with things going from good to bad for the protagonist. Simply put, this is where the main part happens or the most dramatic part.

The denouement comprises events between the falling action and the actual ending scene of the drama or narrative and thus serves as the conclusion of the story. Conflicts are resolved, creating normality for the characters and a sense of catharsis, or release of tension and anxiety, for the reader. Etymologically, the French word dénouement is derived from the Old French word dénouer, "to untie", and from nodus, Latin for "knot." In simple words dénouement is the unraveling or untying of the complexities of a plot.

The comedy ends with a dénouement (a conclusion) in which the protagonist is better off than at the story's outset. The tragedy ends with a catastrophe in which the protagonist is worse off than at the beginning of the narrative. Exemplary of a comic dénouement is the final scene of Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*, in which couples marry, an evildoer repents, two disguised characters are revealed for all to see, and a ruler is restored to power.

The evolution of comedy is much simpler than that of its sister art, though its earlier development has little exact information. With the passing of time comedy has adopted many new horizons. Comedy of manners, comedy of errors, restoration comedy, satirical comedy, or modern free forms of comedy the recipient end has accepted it with appreciation throughout the ages. Regardless of the various opinions and controversies of comedy, one universally accepted fact about comedy is that *Comedy is for all*.

The glorious struggle of 'Comedy', nurtured in the expert hands of dramatists from various parts of the world, and the incredible love for this genre among the contemporaries seems to justify the hope that a worthy future awaits it. This creative journey will continue adopting the changing colors of the socio-political and economic, literary and cultural milieaue.

All plays share some basic elements with which playwrights and producers work: plot, character, setting, dialogue, movement, themes music and spectacle. In addition, many modern plays pay close attention to lighting, costuming and props. When we respond to a play, we observe the elements of drama in action together and the total experience is rich, complex and subtle. Occasionally, we respond primarily to an individual element- the theme or characterization, for instance- but that is rare. Our awareness of the elements of drama is most useful when we are thinking analytically about a play and the way it affects us.

Plot :

The plot in a dramatic or narrative work is constituted by its events and actions, as these are rendered and ordered towards achieving particular artistic and emotional effects. Plot is a term for the action of a drama. Plot implies that the action has a shape and form that will ultimately prove satisfying to the audience. Generally, a carefully plotted play begins with exposition, an explanation of what happened before the play began and of how to characters arrived at their present situation. The play then continues, using suspense to build tension in the audience and in the characters in developing further the pattern of Rising Action. The audience wonders what is going to happen, sees the characters set in motion, and then watches as certain questions implied by the drama are answered one by one. The action achieves its greatest tension as it moves to a point of climax, when a reevaluation is experienced, usually by the chief characters. Once the climax has been reached, the plot continues, sometimes very briefly, in a pattern of Falling action as we reach the drama's conclusion and the characters understand their circumstances and themselves better than they did at the beginning of the play. The function of plot is to give action a form that helps us understand elements of the drama in relation to one another. Often, plays can have several interrelated plots or only one.

The events of a play; the story as opposed to the theme; what happens rather than what it means. The plot must have some sort of unity and clarity by setting up a pattern by which each action initiating the next rather than standing alone without connection to what came before it or what follows. In the plot of a play, characters are involved in conflict that has a pattern of movement. The

action and movement in the play begins from the initial entanglement, through rising action, climax, and falling action to resolution.

Characterization :

Character are the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it- the dialogue and from what they do- the action. The grounds in the character's temperament, desires and moral nature for their speech and actions are called their motivation.

The plays have some of the most remarkable characters ever created in literature. Tragedy usually demands highly complex characters, such as Oedipus, Antigone, Hamlet and Willy Lowman. We come to know them through their own words, through their interaction with other characters, through their expression of feelings and through their presence on stage expressed in movement and gesture.

Character in tragicomedies are individualization and complexly portayed, such as Hedda Gabler, Miss Julie, Nora Helmer and Maurya in Riders to the sea. But just as effective in certain kinds of drama are characters drawn as types, such as Alceste, the misanthrope in Moliere's play. Everyman in medieval drama, and the characters in the first act of Caryl Churchill's top Girls. Type characters are especially effective in satires and comedies of manners.

In many plays we see that entire shape of the action derives from the characters from their strength and weaknesses. In such plays we live through an arbitrary sequence of events. Instead we feel that they create their own opportunities and problems.

These are the people presented in the play that are involved in the perusing plot. Each character should have their own distinct personality, age, appearance, beliefs, socio economic background, and language.

Setting :

The settings of a play includes many things. First, it refers to the time and place in which the action occurs. Second, it refers to the scenery, the physical elements that appear on stage to verify the author's stage directions. The overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time and social circumstances in which its action occurs; the setting of a single episode or scene within such a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place. The overall setting of Macbeth, for example, is medieval Scotland, and the setting for the particular scene in which Macbeth comes upon the witches is basted heath.

When applied to a theatrical production 'setting' is synonymous with décor, which is a French term denoting both the scenery and the properties or movable pieces of furniture, on the stage. In English synonymously with setting is more useful, however, to apply the term more broadly, as the French do, to signify a director's overall conception, staging and directing of a theatrical performance.

Dialogue :

Plays depend for their unfolding on dialogue. The dialogue is the speeches that the characters use to advance the action. Since there is no description or commentary on the action, as there is in most novels, the dialogue must tell the whole story. Fine playwrights have developed ways of revealing character, advancing action, and introducing themes by a highly efficient use of dialogue.

Ordinarily dialogue is spoken by one character to other, who then responds. But sometimes, as in Shakespeare's Hamlet, a character will deliver a soliloquy, in which he or she will speak alone on stage, as if speaking to him or herself. Ordinarily, such speeches take on special importance because they are thought to be especially true, but when they speak to each other, may well wish to deceive, but when they speak to themselves, they have no reason to say anything but the truth.

Movement :

When the Greeks performed their tragedies, the chorus danced in a ritualistic fashion from one side of the stage to the other. Their movement was keyed to the structure of their speeches. In plays such as Hamlet, specific movement is required, as in the ghost scene or in the final dwelling scenes. We as readers or witnesses are energized by the movement of the characters in a play. As we read, stage directions inform us where the characters are, when they move, how they move and perhaps even what the significance of actors' interpretation of their characters' actions.

Lady Gregary moves the ballad- singer and the sergeant in telling ways. They move physically closer to one another as they become closer in their thinking. Their movement seems o pivot around the barrel and in one of the most charming moments of the play; they meet each other's eyes when the ballad- singer sits on the barrel and comments on the way the sergeant is pacing back and faith. They then both sit on the barrel, facing in opposite directions and share a pipe between them almost as a peace offering.

Theme :

What the play means as opposed to what happens (the plot). Sometimes the theme is clearly stated in the title. It may be stated through dialogue by a character acting as the playwright's voice. Or it may be the theme is less obvious and emerges only after some study or thought. The abstract issues and feelings that grow out of the dramatic action.

The theme of a play is its message, its central concerns- in short, what it is about. It is by no means a simple thing to decide what the theme of a play is and many plays contain several rather just a single theme. Often, the search for a theme tempts us to oversimplify and to reduce a complex play to a relatively simple catchphrase.

Sometimes playwrights become anxious about readers and viewers missing their thematic intentions and reveal them in one or two speeches. Usually, a careful reader or viewer has already divined the theme and the speeches are intrusive. But Lady Gregory is able to introduce thematic material in certain movements of dialogue, as in this comment by the sergeant, revealing

that the police are necessary to prevent a revolution. But the thematic material in The Rising of the Moon is spread evenly throughout as is the case in most good plays.

Music :

Music can encompass the rhythm of dialogue and speeches in a play or can also mean the aspects of the melody and music compositions as with musical theatre. Each theatrical presentation delivers music, rhythm and melody in its own distinctive manner. Music is not a part of every play. But, music can be included to mean all sounds in a production. Music can expand to all sound effects, the actor's voices, songs, and instrumental music played as underscore in a play. Music creates patterns and establishes tempo in theatre. In the aspects of the musical the songs are used to push the plot forward and move the story to a higher level of intensity. Composers and lyricist work together with playwrights to strengthen the themes and ideas of the play. Character's wants and desires can be strengthened for the audience through lyrics and music.

Spectacle :

The spectacle in the theatre can involve all of the aspects of scenery, costumes and special effects in a production. The visual elements of the play created for theatrical event. The qualities determined by the playwright that create the world and atmosphere of the play for the audience's eye.

In every play, the elements of drama will work differently, sometimes giving us the feeling that character is dominant over theme, or plot over

character, or setting over both. Ordinarily, critics feel that character, plot and the theme are the most important elements of drama, while setting, dialogue, music and movement come next. But in the best of dramas each has its importance and each balances the others. The interaction of the elements of drama, their balance and their harmony all imply excellence in the theatre. The plays in this collection strive for that harmony and most achieve it memorably.

Comedy is in their depiction of human nature. Where as tragedy emphasizes human greatness, comedy delineates human weakness. Where as tragedy celebrates human freedom, comedy points up human limitation. Comedy exposes human folly, its function is partly critical and corrective. Where tragedy challenges us with a vision of human possibility, comedy reveals to us a spectacle of human ridiculousness that it makes us what to avoid. We go to the theatre primarily for enjoyment, not to receive lessons in personality or character development. Laughter may be educative at the same time that it is enjoyable. The comedies of Aristophanes and Moliere, of Ben Jonson and Congreve are first of all good fun, but secondly they are antidotes for human folly.